

## **DOCTORAL THESIS**

### **The nature and processes of creativity in small businesses what may we learn from a small software firm?**

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**THE NATURE AND PROCESSES OF CREATIVITY IN SMALL BUSINESSES:  
WHAT MAY WE LEARN FROM A SMALL SOFTWARE FIRM?**

**BY**

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## ABSTRACT

What is the nature and processes of creativity in small businesses? My fine-grained qualitative study of a small UK software business, GoTravel, suggests that such businesses often show tremendous creativity in the everyday processes they use to negotiate complex problems that their internal and external limitations induce.

The empirical findings that I use to support this view are in three main parts. First, internal organisational problems, which seemed to restrict employee engagement in creative actions, provoked novel and appropriate — i.e. creative — actions by the small business in pursuing opportunities to access inputs they needed to build competitive software. Second, these actions entailed the tactical creation of fertile sites within collaborations held with product users in line with principles of agile software development, to enable activities relevant for accessing required inputs for building improved software. Third, within these sites, GoTravel advanced its creative actions by leading product users in ‘play’ activities with the purpose of accessing their inputs, which included their time, money, autonomy and actions, and ameliorating the disadvantaged position the small business occupied in the agile-inspired collaborations.

To explicate my findings, I draw on the entrepreneurship literature, particularly work conducted to study processes that entrepreneurs use to orient themselves amid problems, while creating opportunities for establishing new ventures. Here, I focus specifically on spatial concepts Hjorth used to study how entrepreneurial processes unfold under constraining managerial orders, as well as insights from critical perspectives from the co-creation literature. I use these lenses to illuminate the tactical and creative actions that GoTravel manifested in the ways they reassigned ‘managerial orders’ in their software industry, which threatened their ability to access inputs from their product users into other uses — i.e. ‘spaces of play’. Here, they seemed to have ‘lured’ their product users into co-creation activities to accomplish goals for developing new products and, indeed, ‘conquer’ managerial orders in their external environments, even if temporarily.

This study contributes to current research on organisational creativity by drawing attention to creativity inherent in the processes that small businesses use to negotiate problems they often confront in the journey to building novel and impactful solutions. In addition, I bring conceptual lenses from entrepreneurship, a field that is sympathetic to the characteristics of small businesses, particularly their constraints and limitations, to expand current knowledge we have of creativity by such businesses. My research also contributes to current valuable work on co-creation, especially in how organisations may use various forms of co-creation as a tactical and creative tool to address their own limitations.

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## **DEDICATION**

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## **GLOSSARY**

Organisational Creativity: Engagement in processes that can possibly lead to new and useful outcomes to solve organisational problems. These processes can be carried out within organisations and/or outside organisations.

‘Place’: A location which ‘managerial orders’ establish to prescribe rules and principles over the weak. Examples of the software industry’s ‘place’ may include software company offices, trade shows and locations where such companies interact with product users.

Play: Activities intended to generate outcomes that depart from routine ways of doing things. ‘Play’ is usually carried out by entrepreneurs who seek to generate insights for new ventures. In my research, I suggest that small businesses undertake activities of ‘play’ with other actors in their external environment to access relevant resources for building new products.

Re-appropriation: To divert the intended purposes of ‘established managerial orders’ to other, often unintended, but novel uses. Re-appropriation is often done by the ‘weak’. In the case of my research, the small business re-appropriated orders of its industry and product users by diverting their principles and requirements to new activities relevant for building improved and original software solutions.

‘Spaces’: Opportunities created by those under impositions of ‘managerial orders’ to support activities of ‘play’ towards possible new creations or practices.

Strategy/Established Managerial Order: An authority with power that imposes principles or norms on the weak. Strategy is the term in the original theory (de

Certeau, 1988), while established order is adapted to describe the powers of such authorities in the context of organisations (Hjorth, 2004; 2005). For instance, the software industry may be considered an 'established order' that issues prescribed ways of developing software to firms.

Tactics: Actions of the 'weak' aimed at making new uses out of what is intended by the strategy/ established order.

The 'Weak': Those who are under impositions of 'managerial orders' or are constrained in some way. The 'weak' can apply to various units of analysis including individuals, groups and even nations as far as they are disadvantaged and have to rely on the provisions of established orders. In this research, I describe small businesses as 'weak' due to their relatively high vulnerability to external factors in their business environment.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Setting the Scene

Growing up in the 1990s, most Ghanaian children and adults hardly missed 'By the Fireside', a popular children's programme on Ghana National Television. It was a drama series of Ghanaian folktales acted by children. The stories were usually about survival, a topic most Ghanaians are passionate about as it resonates deeply with their experiences of 'making do' with few resources. For most viewers, including myself, our heroes in the stories, as in everyday Ghanaian life, were those who faced barriers in their lives, usually from a social injustice or a lack of an important resource, such as shelter, but who nonetheless could survive and thrive.

'By the Fireside' contributed to my interest in stories and storytelling, which I have used in my research. Importantly, the stories that were told, similar to sermons at church services on how useful suffering can be for opening up new avenues of thinking, similar to lessons in primary and secondary school on how important it was to create something almost, although not necessarily, *ex nihilo* (i.e. out of nothing); and similar to 'advice sessions' at family gatherings on how our paucity of resources (usually, financial) could encourage new enterprises, proved to be ways of encouraging Ghanaians to search imaginatively for a better life. For me, these stories provoked a strong fascination with questions of how people who lived under severe social constraints could survive and thrive despite their constraints. I was keen to know how they could shift from their position of lack to one of fulfilment, partially or otherwise.

My interest in creativity grew from this upbringing. Creativity is generally understood as a process of developing new solutions or responses in order to transform circumstances for the creators or others (Pallota, 2013). It encompasses, for instance, the formation of new perspectives on old problems, building new solutions to new problems, or simply using new techniques to improve ways of doing things (Amabile 1998; Zhou & Hoever, 2014).

In contemporary organisations where I place my research, the subject of creativity is considered to have considerable value (Caniëls & Rietzschel, 2013; Blomberg et al., 2017). This is partly due to the potential of original ideas, processes, and products — expected outcomes of creative processes — to be powerful resources in addressing competing demands that confront businesses (Zhou & Hoever, 2014). Organisations that put in place opportunities to facilitate the development of original and imaginative ideas are expected to enjoy advantages linked to improved organisational capabilities (such as learning and continuous innovation), and development of unique products and increased competitiveness in their markets (Gomes et al., 2016).

This awareness among businesses usually brings to the surface questions on the nature of creative organisations and what their activities towards crafting and building imaginative products look like. When seeking examples of creative organisations, creativity scholars usually think of companies such as Google, 3M, Microsoft, and Amazon (Rigolizzo & Amabile, 2015), and with good reason. Such organisations have been highly successful in generating ground breaking outcomes that chart the course of their industries through substantial investments in research

and development (R&D) activities. For instance, they can afford to give employees slack time to work on side projects that can lead to new ideas relevant for building original products and services (Rigolizzo & Amabile, 2015).

However, recent examples of creative organisations suggest an interesting trend that brings small businesses into focus. Many large companies seem to be relying on the creative and innovation activities of small companies through various collaboration arrangements or outright purchases of their enterprises. For example, Virgin and Eurostar have collaborated with Worn Again, a small business that re-uses their old staff uniforms to create new bags (Smithers, 2011). The technology sector has many similar examples. Recently, in 2014, Facebook bought WhatsApp, a company with only 55 employees (Olson, 2014), and it is no secret how Apple relies heavily on products from small companies, including start-ups (Bradshaw, 2016).

Several business and government leaders are gradually embracing the idea that small businesses can indeed influence the development of industries through their creative activities. In the UK, as elsewhere, governments are encouraging such businesses to develop original ideas and products to contribute to economic growth. The UK Government, for instance, has through its innovation agency, InnovateUK, set up the Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) to support small businesses to develop novel and imaginative products and solutions that address challenges of the public sector (GOV.UK, 2016).

Yet, very little is known about how small businesses come to develop new and useful ideas. In fact, due to a fixation on the ‘creator’ or outcomes of creative

processes, researchers in the field of organisational creativity are usually silent on the actual processes that organisations use to build new and useful ideas (Drazin et al., 1999; Caniëls & Rietzschel, 2013). Given that small businesses often operate with severe resource constraints, this silence seems particularly noticeable as it leaves researchers unclear about how such businesses engage in activities for developing original solutions and products (Berends et al., 2014).

Regarding my quest to learn about the ways or means those under constraints survive, I believe a study of creativity among small businesses can generate valuable insights. In particular, the fact that small businesses often work with scarce resources but often also respond to market problems with creative solutions provides an acute basis to develop interesting knowledge of creative processes.

While I have been motivated by personal questions, the issues that I explore resonate with many others who seek imaginative ways of ‘making do’ in different contexts. Most importantly, my research in the complex context of small businesses introduces fresh lines of discussion in a field that is at risk of stagnation due to hegemonic discourses usually aimed at managing individual cognitive processes to achieve new and useful ideas within organisations (Blomberg, 2014; Blomberg, 2016).

The issues I discuss in my study are elaborations of the seemingly simple question: ‘how do small businesses come to develop new and useful ideas’? In seeking to address this question, my research addresses broader theoretical issues

about how mainstream organisational creativity literature accounts for the distinct ways various businesses come to develop new and useful ideas. It also articulates small businesses' dynamic processes in building original and useful products.

The rest of this introductory chapter is organised as follows: In the next section, I briefly discuss how mainstream approaches account for creativity among small businesses, the need to relax some assumptions underlying these approaches in the field of organisational creativity, and possible ways to develop fine-grained analysis of small businesses' creativity. I then move on to explain how my conception of creativity sits with popular definitions in the organisational creativity literature. This section is useful given the contested use of the term 'creativity'. Next, I outline research questions that underlie my thesis. I end the chapter with an outline of the individual chapters of my thesis, paying attention to important themes addressed in each and, altogether, how these chapters contribute to a deep understanding of small businesses' creativity.

## 1.2 Background to Creativity in Small Businesses

'The challenge here at GoTravel is that everyone is so busy and I think people then become quite robotic, and they don't have that mental capacity to think about creativity' (Felicia, GoTravel).

GoTravel, the small software business Felicia works for, is the central case for my research. My first encounter with the firm was on their company website, where they had enthusiastically announced their unique approach to building innovative software as a key reason for their successful development of creative products and services. My attention was particularly drawn to certain phrases that the mainstream



literature thinks highly of as useful antecedents for organisations' potential in building new and relevant products (Andriopoulos, 2001; Amabile & Pratt, 2016). For example, they identified themselves as being committed to continuous improvements, having a dynamic culture, valuing flat hierarchies, and having a fun, and challenging nature of work. Thus, in light of mainstream variance-based approaches, which often explain organisational creativity as the effect such antecedent factors have on employee creativity (Amabile & Pratt, 2016), it appeared that GoTravel's potential to build original and relevant software products could also be explained by the presence of such factors, as well as other similar attributes of dynamism they presented on their webpage.

However, after a period of internship in this small business, I was intrigued. GoTravel's creative behaviour — i.e. activities relating to the possible development of new and useful ideas (Drazin et al., 1999) — which, at first glance, appeared a straightforward reflection of the interaction between factors in the work environment and employees' cognitive processes, proved to be a much more complex issue. After a closer look at this business, I began to question established modes of thinking regarding the nature of small businesses' creativity and existing approaches to their learning. This research study builds on my initial experience with GoTravel by probing further into the processes that underlie their development of novel and effective products.

Researchers scoping the organisational creativity research field, have identified that the bulk of organisational creativity research considers organisational creativity to be an outcome of employees' (individual and teams) ability, within

organisations, to formulate new and useful responses to organisational problems (in the form of ineffective work processes, new customer demand, outdated product and service offerings, etc.) (Zhou & Hoever, 2014). Accordingly, to analyse the development of imaginative ideas and inventive solutions by organisations, creativity scholars have often focused on studying work environments that can support employees' engagement in activities that could potentially lead to creative outcomes (Isaksen & Akkermans, 2011; Andriopoulos, 2001). Thinking in this line, researchers often treat factors within organisations, such as organisational structures (e.g. hierarchies and leadership) and resources (e.g. time and money), as static independent variables that determine organisations' potential for success in generating creative solutions to market problems.

Central to the conversations of these researchers, which is largely led by social psychology scholars (e.g. Amabile & Pratt, 2016), is the functionalist notion that certain organisations, often those who are open to change and have dynamic structures, are more likely to excel in building new and useful products because such structures are conducive to employee engagement in creative actions (Valaei et al., 2016). This thinking logically brings small businesses into focus. Set against very few empirical studies, researchers suggest that small businesses are more likely to excel in building new and useful products because, they can organise their compact sizes to provide environments that naturally support employees' engagement in novel acts (Berends et al., 2014, Valaei et al., 2016). More specifically, researchers deduce that small businesses probably offer a better environment for employees to engage in activities that lead to developing new and useful ideas because they are

flat, operate in a compact way (Dhillon et al., 2009), and are run by venturesome leaders, who often have an intrinsic drive to be creative (Shin et al., 2013; Manimala, 2008). These reasons have often formed the foundations for explaining the nature of creativity by small businesses (Dhillon et al., 2009).

My experience of GoTravel, however, suggests that this advantage small businesses are presumed to have may often, but not always, be the case. Providing internal support for the development of new products can, in fact, be a challenging task for small businesses whose competitiveness rely on constant development of new solutions to meet emerging market and clients' needs (Çakar & Ertürk, 2010). The testimony of Felicia (from my introductory quote) offers a partial signpost towards my view.

By their nature, small businesses, compared to their larger counterparts, are often beset with a paucity of resources, a factor I find difficult to reconcile with their supposed natural ability to support employees' exploratory and experimental activities as, for instance, suggested by Dhillon et al. (2009). They can be plagued by tight budgets, scant time resources and insufficient human resources, factors which may reduce the efficacy of behaviour advantages (such as dynamism and flat hierarchies) attributed to their ability to develop novel ideas (Madrid- Guijarro et al., 2009). Coupled with these internal constraints, small businesses are relatively more sensitive and vulnerable to factors within wider external environments, such as changes in industry and client demands, which often put a strain on their internal ability to develop imaginative products (Berends et al., 2014).

Highlighting such examples of limitations small businesses experience is not meant to suggest that developing effective and novel responses is an impossibility in the midst of constraints (Caniëls & Rietzschel, 2013; Mainemelis, 2010). Indeed, as noted in section 1.1, my research is borne out of a general sense of intrigue regarding how social entities can tactically manoeuvre what may be considered constraining circumstances to their advantage. I explore this interest in the context of small businesses because while they operate in severely constrained work environments, they remain at the forefront of highly innovative businesses (Berends et al., 2014).

Perhaps, the most important point to consider when studying creativity by such constrained organisations is to examine how their limitations may define what creativity means to them, and how they manifest it. Although an individual level, Mainemelis (2010) suggests that the gap between the need to develop new ideas and resources available for such an endeavour often leads employees to manifest their creativity in the form of creative deviance, where they disregard managerial orders and pursue, often clandestinely, ideas they believe in. Taking this further in his study of entrepreneurial innovation, Manimala (2008) argued that the journey between the lack of resources and creating new ventures is often replete with creative actions that entrepreneurs undertake.

Consequently, small businesses whose market success depend on new ideas may manifest substantial creativity in the ways they facilitate processes towards building new and useful products. In line with this, there appears the need for small business researchers to reorient the lines of discussion they have often

emphasised in their studies, which centre on conducive internal work environments and employee creative activities. In particular, scholars may need to relax some entrenched assumptions underlying mainstream approaches to the study of organisational creativity (particularly in terms of actors and where it is manifested), and bring into research conversations distinct, and often creative ways small businesses may carry out activities and processes towards building new products. Importantly, it may suggest the need for researchers to pay particular attention to the creative ways in which they come to develop new products, that is, their creative processes.

Surprisingly, the processes organisations use in the journey towards developing novel and valuable solutions has received very little attention by organisational creativity researchers (Fortwengel et al., 2017). Where this has been the subject of concern, researchers often reinforce assumptions that an organisation's creativity is found in the creative abilities of its employees, and thus, focus primarily on the cognitive processes individuals, or teams use to generate new ideas (Amabile, 2012; Caniëls et al., 2014). Relatedly, creative processes are, often, only studied as processes that lead to novel outcomes, rather than as inherently creative ways organisations may use to accomplish goals when faced with ambiguous problems (Drazin et al., 1999; Nayak, 2008). The result of these emphases is a view of creative processes as a predictable set of linear actions individuals and work teams engage in to realise new and useful ideas (Amabile & Pratt, 2016).

However, the processes that individuals or teams engage in to develop new and useful ideas differ significantly from those of organisations (Drazin et al., 1999). Specifically, the approach individuals and teams adopt, reflected in linear, staged models does not sufficiently recognise the 'creative', open-ended and complex ways organisations use to craft new products and services. For instance, on the individual and team level, organisational factors are often looked at as static independent variables that affect employee creative processes, and hence may be considered straightforwardly as either constraining or facilitating engagement in creative actions. At the organisational level, however, these factors may serve a dynamic function in the ways in which organisations act by prompting and guiding, if not facilitating, engagement in creative activities (Fortwengel et al., 2017).

My research, which explores creative micro-processes that small businesses often use to create opportunities for original responses and solutions to emerge, offers a way to deepen our current understanding of creative processes at the level of organisations. Additionally, for my quest to examine creativity among small businesses, their processes used towards generating new and useful ideas, which I consider to be inherently creative, can offer relevant insights because these processes are shaped and developed over time, in tandem with both internal organisational needs and external conditions (Fortwengel et al., 2017). To understand them then, is to understand not only the daily decisions and practices of relevant actors but also, small businesses' ongoing and situated capacities to adopt novel ways of improving performance or outputs (Nisula, 2013).

In line with the arguments of a significant minority of creativity researchers, a related point I make with my emphasis on small businesses' creative processes, is that organisational creativity is more than an accumulation of individual and team engagement in creative actions in the workplace (Blomberg, 2016; Drazin et al., 1999; Williams & Yang, 1999). Here, a few researchers have usefully argued that organisations have the capacity to create in ways that may, or may not, encompass individual (and team) level creativity processes (Watson, 2007). Thus, while mainstream approaches to analysing creativity are worthwhile in drawing attention to ways organisations can support employees' inventive practices, they may also silence the multiple, often creative, ways organisations use to build new and useful solutions, products, or services.

In learning about creative processes among small businesses, I perform a momentary shift from the organisational creativity research field, due to a relative paucity of analytical lenses available to study such processes, to entrepreneurship research, where process studies are steadily growing (Hjorth et al., 2015). Importantly, the entrepreneurship literature, with its emphasis on imaginative processes entrepreneurs employ to support creation of new ventures in the midst of little or no resources, may help account for the ways small businesses, often constrained in various ways, are able to engage in creative processes towards building new products (Mainela & Puhakka, 2011; Manimala, 2008).

By drawing from the entrepreneurship literature in this way, my study contrasts with prevailing research approaches in the creativity literature. This is because, despite wide recognition that creativity is about creating new opportunities

from few resources (Chilcott & Barry, 2016), researchers usually discount the potential of organisations who have less resources or undynamic structures to engage in processes that can lead to new and useful outcomes (Fortwengel et al., 2017).

Within the entrepreneurship literature, I specifically draw on the work of Hjorth (2004; 2005), who conceptualises entrepreneurship as a deliberate process of creating 'spaces' within a 'managerially determined place' (Hjorth, 2004: 414). A 'managerially determined place' is a place established by 'managerial orders' to ensure stability and efficiency through certain norms and principles. Owing to the goal of ensuring efficiency and positive performance, such ordered 'places' do not naturally offer a fertile ground for entrepreneurship processes to unfold in ways that lead to the creation of new ventures, as the latter engages in plurality that disrupts the stability of the 'place'. Thus, to make new creations possible within such 'places', Hjorth argues, entrepreneurs engage in tactical processes of creating 'spaces' to host activities of 'play and/or invention' that can potentially lead to imaginative, inventive and novel creations (Hjorth, 2005). Usually, they create such 'spaces' by reinventing new uses out of the impositions, principles and orders prescribed by the established order in the 'place' (Petitgand, 2016).

Hjorth's conception of entrepreneurship as a process of tactically creating 'spaces' where new ventures can be realised emerged from a study of how marginal groups survive under impositions (de Certeau, 1984). Yet, the underlying argument seems promising in offering valuable insights into how small businesses, seemingly disadvantaged because of internal limitations and vulnerability to factors within their



industries and markets, come to build imaginative responses in the 'place' they operate. In fact, some scholars have considered small businesses in a similar way to that in which the actions of marginal groups unfold in de Certeau's research. For example, Berends et al. (2014) suggest that, due to their limited resources, small businesses' innovation processes often entail searching for new opportunities and making the best out of what they have. In my exploratory study, I extend Hjorth's conception to examine how small businesses may engage in creating new uses that benefit developing new and relevant solutions to market problems, even out of their limitations.

One main feature of entrepreneurship processes, which furthers understanding of Hjorth's perspectives, and offers promise to help explicate creative processes, is the practice of leveraging resources from stakeholders. According to entrepreneurship scholars, creating new ventures is hardly an isolated process, as it often involves entrepreneurs leveraging the interactive spaces they share with networks (Mainela & Puhakka, 2011; Leyden & Link, 2015). In fact, current research on business performance suggest that due to their constraints, small businesses actively scout their external environment in search for resources that are not innately available to them (Partanen et al., 2008). By doing so, they gather social capital from their networks that 'may offer an alternative, perhaps even a superior option, to the limitations of the finite supply of internal resources for the new or growing venture' (Anderson & Jack, 2002: 6).

A similar view may help to explain how small businesses approach the processes involved in coming up with new and effective solutions to problems. This

means that I acknowledge the embeddedness of its creative processes in wider external socio-cultural contexts, and consider ways such embeddedness is used to facilitate creative opportunities for building new ventures through activities of co-creation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004)

My research methodology is an exploratory case study of organisational creativity of a small software business, GoTravel. I draw on multiple sources of data from this business and its interactions with product users to deepen current understanding of the understudied area of creative processes by small businesses (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The sources of data include non-participant observations, interviews (face-to-face, email and telephone); press information, and confidential documents. This multi-method approach is essential for generating data from various angles of my central case in order to develop a rich understanding of their creative processes (Bryman, 2015). In reporting my findings, I use storytelling as a means of moving from the activities of individual creative person(s) within the small business work environment to the multiple and ongoing social constructions of processes the organisation used to organise opportunities for new ideas over time (Boje et al., 2015). Grounded in a social constructionist ontology, the methodology and methods I use to collect and analyse data acknowledge the plurality of voices and representations of small businesses and show how these are constantly in motion to shape their creative processes (Bailey et al., 2009).

My research mainly seeks to contribute fresh insights to existing knowledge of processes organisations use to build new and useful ideas. My study suggests that such processes are characterised by dynamic social interactions among

relevant actors within and around organisations that may lead to new and original solutions to address organisational problems (such problems can be from the organisation or from its external environment). This dynamic view of creative processes is of urgent importance to the organisational creativity literature, where mainstream researchers till date, have mostly presented static and linear views of the creative process due to their emphasis on cognitive processes that individuals and groups may use to generate new ideas (Amabile & Pratt, 2016).

Situating my study in the largely ignored context of small businesses, my research introduces a conceptual perspective into organisational creativity research that is sympathetic to the strengths and limitations of such businesses, and hence offers valuable insights into their creative processes. Here, Hjorth's (2004; 2005) emphasis on the space - creation activities that characterise entrepreneurial processes makes it possible to conceive of ways in which small businesses, despite their limitations, are able to engage in activities that may lead to new creations. Furthermore, my emphasis on tactical processes of leveraging interactive spaces shared with stakeholders, in line with the co-creation literature (Bonsu & Darmody; Cova et al., 2011) extends current understanding of organisational creativity research into fertile locations outside organisations, which remain understudied for their potential to be used for creative actions.

At a broader level, the distinct ways small businesses build new and useful ideas, which my theoretical and empirical approach allow me to uncover, seem to echo calls for organisational creativity researchers to desist from treating knowledge from popularly used empirical contexts, such as large businesses or behavioural

laboratories and classrooms (Zhou & Hoever, 2014) as applicable to all sizes and nature of organisations (Banks et al., 2002). It appears to suggest, instead, the need for researchers to attend to distinctive characteristics of the context they study and seek conceptual lenses that allow fine-grained and relevant analysis of creative processes in their chosen contexts of study.

In the next section, I briefly discuss how I have used existing definitions of creativity in my thesis.

### 1.3 Creativity – Defining the Concept

An agreed definition of creativity is difficult to find partly because various disciplines including psychology, education, visual arts and literature conceptualise it differently. Oxford Dictionary (2014) defines creativity as ‘the use of imagination or original ideas to create something’. While most disciplines retain the attribute of ‘originality’, each makes adaptations to suit the focus of their particular subject disciplines. For instance, because businesses have a primary motive to make profit, creativity in management research is usually defined as coming up with new ideas that are useful for solving problems (Anderson et al., 2014), whereas in visual arts, the definition focuses on the ability to come up with ideas, which have aesthetical value to a particular audience and expresses the intended meaning of the creator (Rigolizzo & Amabile, 2015; Tomas, 1958). The vast meanings associated with creativity make it necessary to clarify my use of the word in this thesis.

I place my thesis in the research context of organisational creativity, where creativity is defined as the ability to develop new and useful responses to solve open

ended-problems (Amabile & Pillemer, 2012). The task or problem requiring a creative solution(s) must be open-ended, and without an obvious solution at the outset to allow for heuristic activities that can generate new and useful ideas (Mumford & Gustafson, 2007). The criteria of newness and usefulness are two important factors that feature in most management definitions of organisational creativity (George, 2007). Without being new, the subject being referred to (behaviours, processes, persons or products) will be common and mundane—in stark contrast with what creativity denotes—novelty (Runco & Jaeger, 2012). A creative endeavour should also be useful and appropriate to solve a genuine problem at stake (Runco & Jaeger, 2012). This guards against drawing acts, which are novel for the sake of being novel into the precincts of creativity in organisations. For instance, it prevents an organisation from being labelled creative just because it developed a new but ludicrous product, which does not meet a need in the market.

While the definition above and accompanying criteria are probably not contentious among researchers in the field of management research, I explain in what follows that I use this definition of creativity mainly for the purpose of aligning my research with the broad subject area of organisational creativity studies rather than for an ontological purpose of what is (or is not) creativity in my research.

First, the criteria of usefulness and novelty have ambiguous connotations, which make it difficult to apply to work contexts. This is partly due to contested views of organisational actors on what connotes usefulness or novelty. They both presuppose the presence of some objective measures of what is new and useful despite the difficulty in reaching agreements on these. Definitions of what is new vary across organisational settings as a response or idea may be new to an

organisation but not an industry or country (Warr & O'Neill, 2005). A similar concern is often raised regarding the label of usefulness. Here, a common question asked is useful for whom or who defines what is useful? George (2007) responds by highlighting the fact that stakeholders have different interests, which compete on the realisation of every idea. Thus, what is deemed useful to one stakeholder could be costly to the other. For example, a government department could come up with new ways to make books accessible and free to students. From the perspective of the government, students and parents, this is a creative endeavour as it is new and creates value in terms of increasing accessibility to educational resources. For book retailers, it is a costly act to their business. Such difference in perceptions on what is new and useful requires careful application of this definition in particular contexts.

Secondly, and perhaps most significant to my research is the fact that the definition's emphasis on likely outcomes of the creative process—usefulness and novelty—marginalises research on other dimensions of organisational creativity, including creative processes (Blomberg, 2016). This silencing is illustrated, for instance, by researchers' inclination to assess an organisations' creativity by studying the conditions in the work environment that either support or constrain possibilities of organisational members to generate ideas or solutions, which are new and useful (George, 2007).

While such inputs and outcomes can be highly indicative of an organisation's creativity and/or creative behaviour, other researchers have suggested that there is much to learn about creativity of organisations from processes they use to create opportunities for such outcomes to emerge (Gilson & Shalley, 2004). In this sense, creativity as a process focuses the research enquiry on how individuals (or

organisations), faced with complex or unclear situations, orient themselves, and engage in creative acts with the intent of manoeuvring such situations (Drazin et al., 1999). Such processes are 'creative', even in the absence of new or useful outcomes (Drazin et al., 1999). Nayak (2008), bringing insights from practice theory clarifies further what it means to study creativity as a process. He shows how managers who may not consider themselves creative in the normal parlance of the word — i.e., in terms of achieving new and useful outcomes — may as yet show tremendous 'creativity' in the ways they creatively respond to ill-defined organisational situations. Shifting from the view of creativity in terms of an outcome that individuals reach, or the organisational conditions that support them to reach search outcomes, he argues that:

'managers do not make up something that is novel and appropriate, they accomplish something in a novel and appropriate way. As an accomplishment, creativity is the ability to "make do", to search for simplicity, to be *metistic*, to demonstrate *economy of effort* in achieving maximum results by being sen/sitive to the "opportune moment' (Nayak, 2008: 421).

Blomberg (2014) argued, similarly, that defining creativity in the sense of new and useful outcomes alone presupposes that organisational creativity is present only with the realisation of such outcomes, an approach that, contrasts with experimentations and explorations into the unknown required of creative processes.

In my research on creativity of small businesses, I follow these researchers to focus on creativity that is manifested in the ways that such businesses often need to navigate uncertainties and complexities that characterise their daily operations. Thus, while, to a considerable extent, I agree that new and useful ideas are important, I do not rigidly align my research with this often-cited (Amabile, 2012)

definition of creativity. To avoid ambiguities in my study, I do not refer to possible outcomes of creative processes, for example products, solutions or ideas, as 'creative', except when interviewees have used this term in interviews. I use words like 'new and useful products', 'competitive solutions' and 'novel outcomes' to differentiate organisational creativity that is evident in outcomes from my use of the term as it applies to processes of engaging in creative actions when faced with ill-defined problems.

In addition, I believe that understanding creativity should be a 'creative' process of recognising the number of meanings possible and the social constructions under study. One way to achieve this is to allow the meanings practitioners in a specific domain associate with the term to shape our definitions, and hence our understanding of the term, resulting in what Chilcott & Barry (2016: 57) defined as 'local situated knowledge' of creativity.

Through interviews, therefore, I have tried to understand how professionals understand and make sense of creativity in their software development activities. Though participants in my study described creativity in the terms identified by prevailing literature, majority of the time, they also used words that describe creativity in processual ways, which focused on their sense making experiences. Thus, they usually highlighted elements of creating opportunities to engage in developing new and useful ideas, e.g., making room, creating time, making space. I privilege these conceptions in my approach to studying and understanding creativity in this thesis in order to provide a framework for examining the phenomenon as a social process of creating opportunities and making use of constraints (Gomes et



al., 2016). As Banks et al. (2002: 255) put it, 'the meanings attached to creativity are variable and contested, and the precise definition and management is strongly determined by the internal workplace, culture and the external social and economic conditions within which firms operate'.

Having explained how I have defined creativity in my study, I will now move on to introduce key issues in the software industry in which I have placed my study, briefly relating this to the small software business that was the basis of my research.

#### 1.4 My Choice of Software Development Businesses

Software activities have become central to almost all industries to the extent that it is now difficult to designate an actual software industry. For instance, financial service organisations, hospitals and universities are increasingly setting up dedicated software departments to develop in-house software products and services. My research focuses on firms established with the specific motive of developing software to differentiate them from other industries, which rely in part on software. They are defined as professional organisations specially set up to develop and offer computing programmes, functionalities and services to clients (Edison et al., 2013).

I had always considered software development businesses as creative organisations. I perceived that it was essential for such businesses to consistently explore novel approaches to developing software to address product user needs. This perception was substantiated when I came to realise the difficulty in clearly defining the problem that software products should solve (Coleman & O'Connor,

2007; Annosi et al., 2015). Software development work relies on heuristically experimenting with solutions whose performance and appeal cannot be predicted ahead of actual installation and use. As Dan Bricklin, co-developer of 77 VisiCalc explained: 'We try to build things, and we really don't know what they are until we start to build them. It isn't programming that is hard; it is figuring out what we're trying to do that is hard' (National Research Council, 1991). Although developers try to draft a clear specification as possible of what may be essential at the beginning of every development task (Coleman & O'Connor, 2007), uncertainties muddle clarity and make success a pure case of heuristic steps. These steps involve exploring and experimenting with unfamiliar ideas, an activity that features a lot of creative processes (Mumford et al., 2012). Thus, when I decided to probe into the nature of creativity in organisations, the software industry appeared a logical option as a representative case of creative firms (Yin, 2014).

On this basis, I had my first informal conversation with a Systems Administrator, Gabby (in charge of running computer systems in a software company in London), with the intention of exploring the software development process (my research proxy for a creative process) and conditions within software companies that influenced it. A fellow PhD colleague introduced me to Gabby. I must note that this conversation was not part of my actual data collection but formed part of initial preparations of the nature of questions to explore for the rest of my data collection and study (Maxwell, 2012).

Against my expectations, Gabby challenged perceptions of the centrality of creativity to software development arguing that the priority of many software developers was to efficiently develop software using laid down methodologies:

‘Software doesn’t need to be creative. I don’t believe in it. Software needs to be pedantic; they need to mind about details. What you need to do is to have an infinite amount of care for small details and once you have that, the rest is easy and some people who don’t understand what you’re doing are calling you creative, but as a matter of fact, you’re just applying the same old stuff time after time in a way that makes sense’ (Systems Administrator).

A few other software development professionals I spoke with in GoTravel shared this view. Interestingly, others described their software development task as an extremely creative one. A few others supported both viewpoints. For instance, in my first conversation with Jack, the managing director of GoTravel (my central case organisation), he suggested in answer to what he thought the role of creativity was to software development that:

‘There are businesses where creativity is fundamental to the business. When you talk about design, for instance, creativity is kind of fundamental to what they do. In an industry like ours, creativity is less overt. We’re running systems and operational stuff which doesn’t rely so much on creativity, it relies so much on being methodological and systematic, and so are some of the things that are the antithesis of creativity’ (MD, GoTravel).

Then he noted in a second interview;

‘I guess to continuously grow, and that is one thing we strive to do, to continuously get better at what we do, that benefits from creativity, it benefits from people actually coming into the room and clearing their heads and saying, ‘right, looking at it from different perspectives, what can we do differently rather than being stuck in a rut’ (MD, GoTravel).

I found the diversity of views regarding the value of creativity to software development unsettling given my decision to explore creativity in this industry – one I had thought of as a perfect example of creative businesses. In a continuous attempt at resolving this challenge, I became more aware of the division between professionals regarding the value of existence of creativity in software development. I recognised three different camps of how professionals construed the relationship between creativity and software development. In the first, creativity was seen as essential to software development and perhaps the lifeline to such firms. In the second, attention to detail and the ability to follow stipulations set out by software programmes appeared more desirable compared to attempts to be creative. The third camp was drawn to both sides partly because they occupied positions, which helped them to appreciate both views. These almost contrasting camps and the paradox they projected provide an interesting context to explore creativity in small businesses. I perceived that the different viewpoints surrounding software development and creativity were good reasons in themselves to focus on these firms for my research. Both creativity, addressing ill-defined problems with new and useful ideas (Amabile, 2012), and 'discipline', a term that Glass (2006) used to define strictly controlled processes, are essential for software development. The different views on which one should be prioritised reflect one of the longstanding paradoxes of creativity in businesses in general (Cropley, 1997), a factor I believe warrants research attention to understand how firms in this sector manage the paradoxes surrounding their daily work.

In this line of thinking, Glass (2006: 9) noted that 'one of the oldest dichotomies of our profession (software development) has been precisely this

difference: should software be built by teams that are disciplined and factory-like or by teams that are flexible and highly self-motivated? I consider that aside from being an interesting addition to the academic literature, practitioners within the software industry also stand to benefit from my study of creativity because it could provide useful evidence to reconsider how they may be missing its espoused benefits. Indeed, a consensus from some conversations I had with employees was that very few people thought themselves as creative because they felt they needed to be efficient by following software methodologies stipulated for their tasks. That very few employees perceive creativity as a desirable behaviour in an ill-defined activity such as software development has dire consequences on their creative behaviour. This is because there is very little motivation to engage in behaviours considered creative (Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2007). By focusing on software firms in my research, I contribute to research that examines organisational creativity in the context of firms torn between constraining boundaries, on the one hand, and flexibility in thought and activity, on the other (Gilson et al., 2005; Mainemelis, 2010).

Another reason for my choice of software development firms is that it is a quintessential high-tech sector whose activities affect most industries (Fuggetta & Di Nitto, 2014). With worldwide technological advancements moving at an unprecedented rate (Edison et al., 2013), there is increased pressure on high technology firms particularly software firms to creatively meet growing needs. In other words, in an era when technological advancements and resulting client expectations are increasingly shifting to unexpected margins, the onus on the software development industry to stay ahead of market demands seem to have spiralled (Nambisan, 2002). Focusing on how these firms approach the processes

essential for the possible generation of new ideas, offers a way to develop deeper insights into one of the most crucial ways software businesses can improve the value of their productivity and output and remain competitive in their markets (Edison et al., 2013).

Given the wealth of possibilities that creativity studies can benefit from software businesses, there is surprisingly little empirical work on creativity in software firms. Most attention has been paid to either innovation in software firms (Edison et al., 2013; Rose et al., 2016) or creativity within the broad context of high-technology firms (Im & Workman Jr, 2004), and others still on creativity in selected high-technology sectors, such as the video games industry (Tschang, 2007) and the advertising industry (Stuhlfaut, 2011). Few exceptions to this relative sparseness can be seen in the works of Information Systems scholars (Glass, 2006, Gutbrod & Wiele, 2012) who have specifically explored creativity in software development. The findings of these studies have drawn our attention to, as well as enriched understanding of how creativity can be a useful way to develop the activities of software development. However, their findings appear of limited applicability to the management and organisational creativity literature because of their strong focus on technical aspects of software development rather than social and managerial elements of the process. My research on creativity in the context of software businesses, using a management perspective, is a useful addition to the creativity literature by deepening our understanding of the micro-organisational processes that software businesses undertake as part of their aim to develop and deliver creative software products.

A final point worth making in this section relates to my choice, as noted above, of software development as a proxy for creative processes. I chose this out of a number of options to study creativity of small businesses. For instance, I could have used the architecture and design of the work environment as a proxy for studying creativity based on how these influenced employee actions towards development of imaginative products (Martens, 2011). However, I sought an understanding of creativity as a socially constructed process (a point I shall come to shortly) and thus, needed a proxy that unfolded over time. Secondly, I realised based on an internship I had at GoTravel that of all the activities carried out by the company, employees considered the process of software development, especially where it entails building new functionality, as the most creative. Many scholars have lent support to this stance by noting that software development needs creative thinking (Gutbrod & Wiele, 2012, Glass, 1994). In sum, I perceived that the likelihood of software development to unfold in ways that required ongoing interactions among different actors as well as the novelty and originality it requires could offer relevant insights into understanding creative processes by small businesses.

Having discussed my rationale for choosing firms within the software industry as my empirical context and the software development process as a proxy for creative processes, I now proceed to draw attention to changes in the industry that have influenced the organisation and management of activities and created a central position for small businesses, which I focus my research on.

#### 1.4.1 Changes in Methods of Software Development and Implications for Small Businesses

In this section, I present a background discussion of the software industry, the chosen empirical context for my study, in order to set the scene for my discussion of creative processes of small software businesses. The main issues I address in the section are the global spread of the industry's activities, their relevance to economic growth in the current knowledge economy, software development methodologies that have featured in the industry, implications of such methodologies on how work is organised by software development businesses, and what these discussions mean for where GoTravel sits within the industry. In my discussions, I pay particular attention to the agile method of software development, identifying its principles and requirements, as well as advocates who propagate its agenda among practitioners in the industry. In the second half of the section, I shift attention to small software businesses in the industry, examining reasons for the key position they occupy and the need for research attention to such businesses. I end the section with a discussion of why I chose GoTravel, as a central case for the study.

Software development activities have witnessed a wide global spread, present in both developing and developed countries. Northern America currently occupies over a quarter of the world's software and IT market. The region, therefore, dominates the global sector, and it has pioneered the bulk of new advancements relevant to software development (International Trade Association, 2018). In recent decades, India has also risen to become a key global player, leading the market in developing countries (Kumar, 2014).



Western Europe occupies the second largest position in the global market, making it one of the most important economies in the global software development sector (BSA, 2018). In fact, in 2016 software development activities in the region contributed €910 billion (7 percent) of the total GDP among the 28 countries in the region (BSA, 2018). Within the regional landscape, the United Kingdom has been identified as the leading player. In 2017, the software sector alone contributed 65.3 billion to the UK economy, higher than any of the other big EU markets (Italy, France, Germany and Spain). Partly for this reason, software businesses in the UK form an important part of economic activities and warrant research attention.

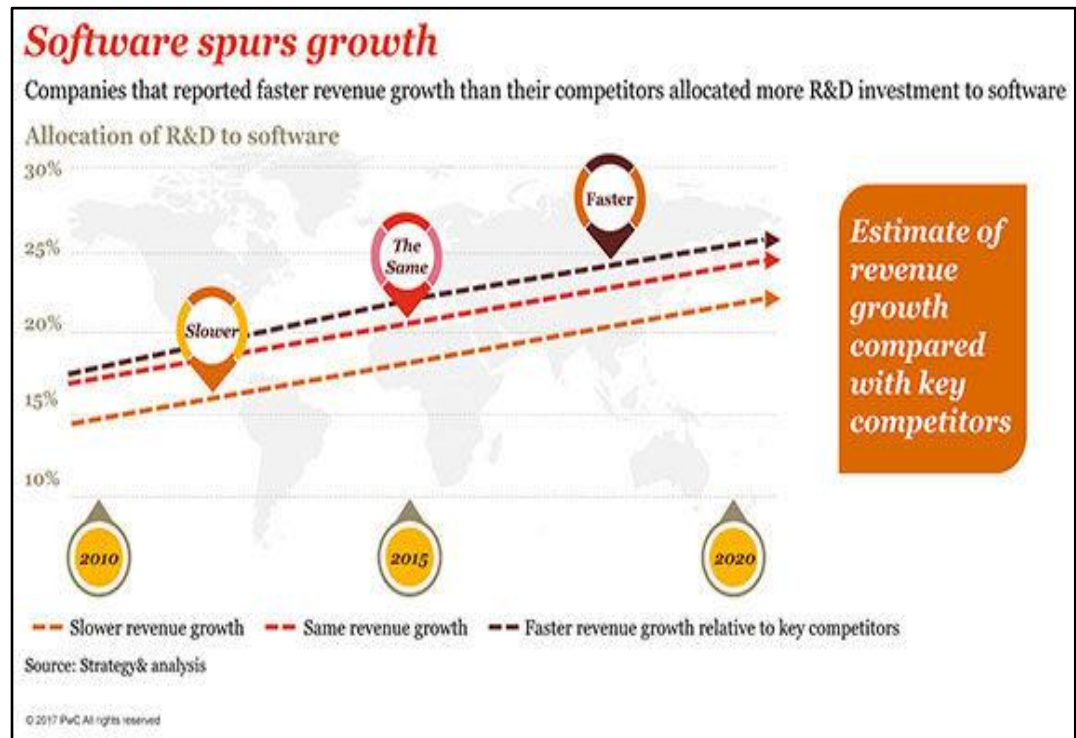
A noteworthy point to consider relates to the fact that the statistics above are not only from activities of software development businesses. Instead, they have been drawn from across multiple economic sectors where in house software development and use have become essential. As I noted in the introductory paragraph of this section, there is active participation in global software activities by sectors not specifically designated as software and IT focused, to the extent that it is now difficult to delineate a particular software sector. For instance, financial service organisations, agricultural sectors, health care organisations, educational institutions and manufacturing companies are increasingly setting up dedicated departments to develop in-house software products and services (BSA, 2018).

Though such software development by non-IT industries, particularly in Europe, is substantial (Bell et al., 2018), a significant number of firms are set up with the specific motive of developing and offering computing programmes, functionalities and services to external clients (Lippoldt & Strykowski, 2009, Edison

et al., 2013). I focus my research on this group of firms. I have limited my study to such firms because I expect that they have common management practices and patterns of behaviour that may be distinct from say, in-house software development departments in a bank, which are linked to other non-software development departments. In the rest of my thesis, my reference to the software industry will thus refer to this group of businesses.

The relevance of activities of the software industry to contemporary businesses, and their respective economies is well documented (Messerschmitt & Szyperski, 2005). For most sectors, appropriate software is considered an indispensable asset that can potentially transform businesses and induce growth. A 2016 Strategy and Business report by PwC found that companies who prioritised software in their R&D budgets were more likely to achieve growth, compared to their counterparts who did not (Figure 1.1) (Jaruzelski et al., 2018). The report, titled *Software-as-a-Catalyst*, further argued that for most businesses, monies saved in the cost of processes as a result of introducing software could surpass monies gained from new revenues (Jaruzelski et al., 2018).

Figure 2.1: Revenue Growth for Businesses Investing in Software



Source: Strategy and Analysis, cited from Jaruzelski et al (2018)

The relevance of the software industry seems to be even more pronounced in recent times because of the proliferation of businesses that manage information and knowledge as a core part of their daily tasks (Messerschmitt & Szyperski, 2005). For such businesses, relevant technology, including software is deemed crucial to their ability to effectively create, manage and secure information and knowledge in order to improve their competitiveness in markets (Bell et al., 2018). In essence, within the current knowledge economy, value creation that ensures competitive growth for organisations hinges on appropriate software (Nowaka & Granthamb, 2000).

Partly because of these indications, businesses within most developed countries, and increasingly developing countries, seem to have developed an insatiable demand for both bespoke and off-the-shelf software products (Ilyas & Khan, 2015). This has led to increased attention by practitioners, such as the Software Alliance, and academics in the fields of software engineering and software development as they seek to study and manage developments in the industry.

Despite its prominence in economic and academic discourses, however, the software industry remains at a young stage of growth having only begun to operate commercially in the 1950s (Messerschmitt & Szyperski, 2005). In fact, methods of developing software are still evolving and not fully standardised across the industry. Software businesses therefore have to adopt fluid and flexible management practices that are able to accommodate the requirements of evolving methodologies (Highsmith & Cockburn, 2001). In a brief period of two decades, businesses in the industry have moved from relying on heavy or process-laden methodologies to lighter or agile methodologies (Glass, 2006). Software methodology is the accepted structure that informs how a firm approaches its software development (Lee & Yong, 2013).

'Heavy' or traditional methods of developing software, such as the waterfall methodology, are said to have been well suited to the hierarchical organisational structures typical of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Nerur et al., 2005). They are characterised by strictly defined processes and uninterrupted cycles of development from start to finish, see Figure 1.2. In this sense, projects using waterfall methodologies have their requirements and plans for development 'locked in and frozen' before the

design and development start (Abrahamsson et al., 2002:12). These methodologies seek to eliminate practices that may distract from sequentially planned development tasks (Maruping et al., 2009). Thus, they can be advantageous for large projects (Turk et al., 2014), as well as for projects where developers and product users have a very clear understanding at the onset of what is being built and how what is being built should function (Abrahamsson et al., 2002). Because of these same features, however, waterfall methodologies are considered to be less useful for the bulk of current software projects. This is because market needs are becoming more complex and dynamic, and product users often require ongoing changes in the software, which developers need to incorporate as the development process proceeds (Maruping et al., 2009).

To respond to the limitations of heavy methodologies, software development practitioners started drawing attention to the need for more lightweight methodologies to accommodate the dynamism in work environments that most businesses in the 21<sup>st</sup> century were shifting to. This led to the launch of the agile methodology in 2001, when seventeen key practitioners met in Utah, USA, in what is now considered as the meeting that revolutionised the industry (Highsmith & Cockburn, 2001). All seventeen participants (made up of chief technology officers, owners of start-ups, presidents of established IT companies, authors and programmers) had been individually advocating for various forms of lightweight and more flexible methodologies prior to their attendance at this meeting (Highsmith, 2001). The consensus at the meeting was to use the term 'agile', which is 'the ability to create and respond to change in order to succeed in an uncertain and turbulent environment' (Agile Alliance, 2018: no page), as an umbrella term to capture the

alternative lightweight methodologies that had started springing up to address the limitations of heavy methodologies. Importantly, at this meeting, a manifesto, called the Agile Manifesto, was launched to spell out the aims and framework of agile software development methodologies (Annosi et al., 2015).

Some participants of the Utah meeting, together with new advocates of agile methods of developing software, established a permanent organisation in the later part of 2001, when the meeting was held in Utah, called the Agile Alliance (Agile Alliance, 2018). Members of this organisation, hereafter, also referred to as The Alliance in my research, continue to be highly esteemed by practitioners in the industry, and remain influential in propagating ideas of agile development methods in the industry (Chow & Cao, 2008).

The Alliance defines agile methodologies of developing software simply as ‘an umbrella term for a set of methods and practices based on the values and principles expressed in the agile manifesto’ (Agile Alliance, 2018). The manifesto spells out four values to guide software development work. These include individuals and interactions over processes and tools, working software over comprehensive documentation, customer collaboration over contract negotiation and responding to change over following a plan (Agile Alliance, 2018). The principles underlying the methodology are listed in Table 1.1.

**Table 1:1 Agile Software Principles Set Out by the Agile Alliance**

Our highest priority is to satisfy the customer through early and continuous delivery of valuable software.	Working software is the primary measure of progress.
Welcome changing requirements, even late in development. Agile processes harness change for the customer's competitive advantage.	Agile processes promote sustainable development. The sponsors, developers, and users should be able to maintain a constant pace indefinitely.
Deliver working software frequently, from a couple of weeks to a couple of months, with a preference to the shorter timescale.	Continuous attention to technical excellence and good design enhances agility.
Business people and developers must work together daily throughout the project.	Simplicity--the art of maximizing the amount of work not done--is essential.
Build projects around motivated individuals. Give them the environment and support they need, and trust them to get the job done.	The best architectures, requirements, and designs emerge from self-organizing teams.
The most efficient and effective method of conveying information to and within a development team is face-to-face conversation.	At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behaviour accordingly.

Source: Agile Alliance (2018)

While the values and principles of agile methodologies are widely embraced by many practitioners, there are different ways of applying them depending on the type of agile methodology an organisation adopts. Examples of agile methodologies are SCRUM, XP, Agile Unified Process, Agile Models (Turk et al., 2014). Businesses may make decisions on the specific type of agile methodology to adopt depending on the time span, size and type of project as well as the internal characteristics of the organisation. For instance, XP methodologies achieve flexibility by embracing refactoring, that is making useful changes to the internal structure of a software code, while SCRUM achieves its flexibility by emphasising short sprints (a cycle of development lasting from one to four weeks) in development (Maruping et al., 2009).

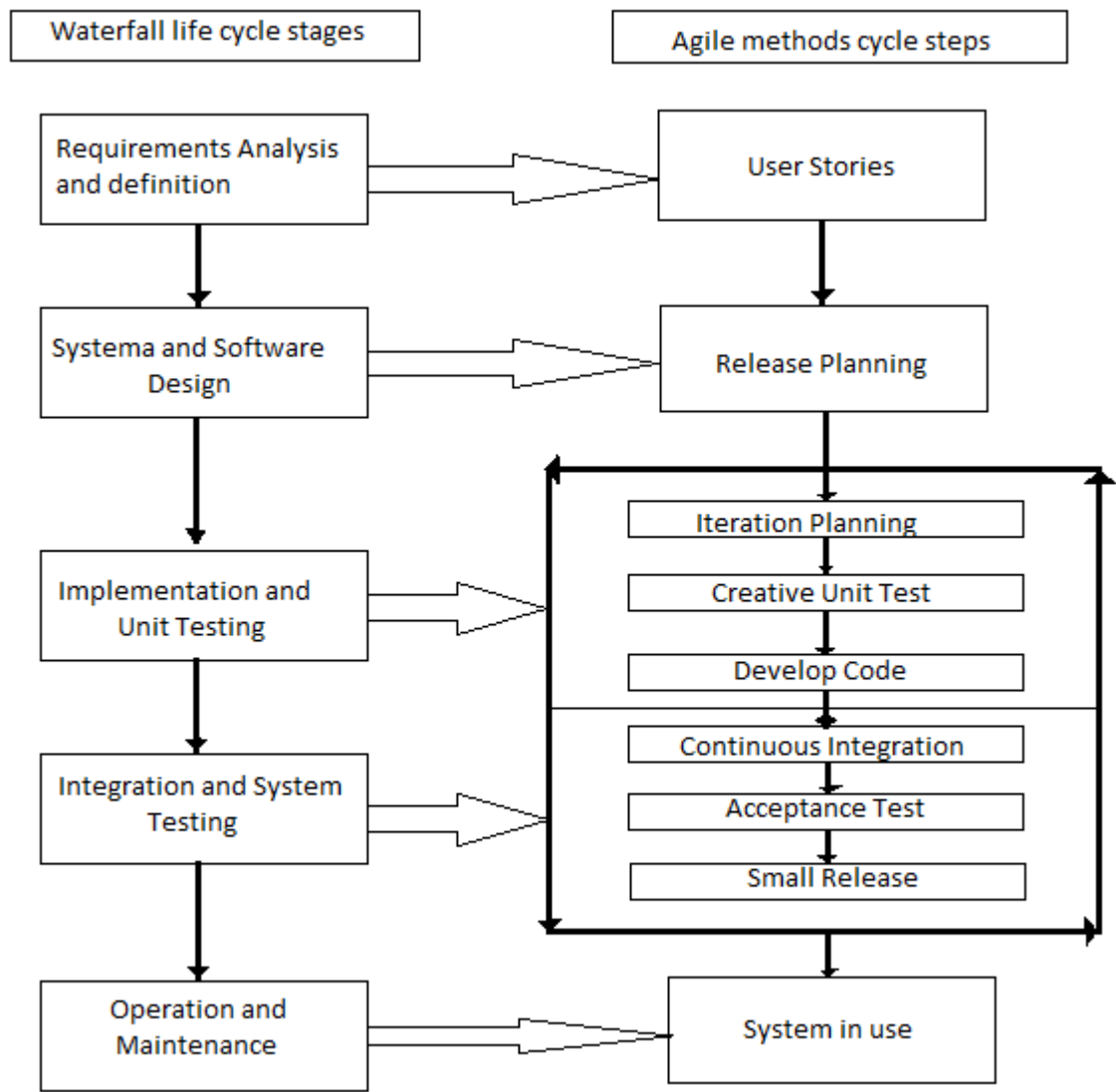
Notwithstanding such differences in application, a common value proposition that supports the use of various types of agile methodologies is that they all prioritise

flexibility, and thus make it possible to embrace inevitable changes during all stages of development (Annosi et al., 2015). Such changes may come from experiences developers gain from previous stages of development, ongoing requirements from product users and changes in the environment (Turk et al., 2014). In fact, of all the features scholars use to distinguish agile methodologies from traditional methodologies, flexibility and centrality of customers are the most popular (Maruping et al., 2009; Annosi et al., 2015).

Unlike the waterfall methodology, which follows long uninterrupted cycles in the development process, agile methodologies of developing software are organised around short sprints. At the end of each sprint, meetings between developers and users are held to assess work done and to make inputs for subsequent stages of development. While agile methodologies also seek efficiency, they aim to deliver customer value as defined by the customer (Highsmith & Cockburn, 2001). Therefore, processes involve close interactions with end users who provide constant feedback at each stage of development until agreed outcomes and specifications are reached (Schwabe & Beedle, 2001, Annosi et al., 2015). Figure 1.2 compares the life cycle of waterfall methods of development with agile methods of development.



Figure 1.2: Waterfall Methods versus Agile Methods Life Cycles



Source: Huo et al. (2004)

Even though agile methodologies of development have been around for less than two decades, an overwhelming majority of companies in the software industry have adopted the bulk of its underlying values and principles. VersionOne, an organisation that has been running annual surveys on the adoption and use of agile methodologies since 2006, reported that in 2016, 94% of participants who took part

in their survey said that their organisations used a type of agile methodology (VersionOne, 2017).

One implication of the widespread use of agile methodologies is the need for research attention on how work processes are being organised to suit the values and principles stipulated by The Alliance. The flexibility demands of agile methodologies make it particularly necessary for organisations to be dynamic and adaptable in order to embrace regular (re-) configurations of the software product to meet ongoing product user demands. In fact, one motivation for pushing the agenda of agile development, according to The Alliance, is for the concept of agility that underlies the methodology to permeate the very core of how work is organised in software businesses, so that such businesses generally reflect more agility in thinking (Highsmith, 2001).

Another implication of firms' adoption of agile methodologies is the increased need for developers to work closely with customers in each iterative cycle of development. This ensures that customers' feedback and ongoing requirements can be incorporated before moving on to subsequent stages of development. Thus, in developing software the agile way, developers and customers play quite different roles from that of developing software using waterfall methodologies. In the latter, developers are mostly in charge of the actual development, that is, after the requirements have been agreed. Customers evaluate the suitability of the product only after it had been fully developed. In the former, product users have more control during the course of development and dictate their, often, changing and dynamic, requirements to developers as the process of development unfolds (Maruping et al., 2009).

Thus, while agile software methodologies promise to support ongoing changes, customers, rather than development companies most often lead this. In other words, while the flexibility that characterises agile software methodologies may mean being open to incorporating insights development companies may have gained from previous stages of development (Turk et al., 2014), it most often entails embracing emerging or changing needs and requirements of customers in the development process, as partners of developing customised software (Maruping et al., 2009). In this sense, the ability of software development organisations to manoeuvre the product, by adding new features for instance, may be limited. Small businesses may be more at a disadvantage in terms of the inputs they can make into software functionalities being offered to their customers. This is partly because small software businesses operate as market-led organisations, and thus, have a constant need to go with the demands of their customers.

In the next section, I provide a brief explanation of the relevance of small businesses in the software industry, paying attention to the position they occupy and how the trends discussed in this section implicate how such businesses are managed.

#### 1.4.2 The Position of Small Software Businesses in the Industry

A few large companies dominate the software industry. However, in countries with well-developed software sectors, small businesses, are estimated to occupy 85%, or more, of all companies operating in the industry (Sánchez-Gordón et al., 2016). Because of the sheer number of such businesses, they form an important part of the software industry globally.

Aside their large representation in the industry, there are other reasons small businesses have become important in the software development industry. First, the agile methodologies, which are increasingly becoming the norm in the industry is well suited to the small projects that small businesses work on (Lee & Yong, 2013; Wang, 2007). Thus, GoTravel, the central case of my study has joined other small businesses to adopt agile methodologies of developing software. Second and relatedly, while bureaucracies in larger firms appear to be in natural conflict with the tenets of agile methodologies (Highsmith, 2001), small businesses operating in the industry seem to have been placed at a natural advantage. The compact sizes and dynamism of small software business have been argued to enable them to adopt and institute strategies that are well suited to the principles of the agile methodologies and the accompanying (re-) organisation of business activities (Lee & Yong, 2013). For example, the fact that small software businesses are more responsive to changes in their markets and able to adapt to evolving needs may enable them to spot changing trends in the markets they serve and include them relatively easily into different stages of product development. In addition, due to the natural proximity of small businesses to their customers, they are at an advantage of receiving regular feedback, which they feed into their development (McAdam, 2000). In essence, small businesses seem to be at an advantage in adopting and using agile methodologies because they are more dynamic and able to circumvent the unpredictability that comes with an 'agile' regime.

GoTravel, the central case of my research is one of the software businesses that populates the United Kingdom's software market. Like other small software businesses, GoTravel has quite recently moved to agile methodologies of

development. It is thus continuously fashioning its processes and architecture to integrate well with the requirements of agile methodologies. Despite the advantages small software businesses such as GoTravel appear to have when it comes to using agile methodologies to develop software, they may struggle to make sense of the environmental turbulence that characterises their industry, and may find it difficult to navigate some of the standards that The Alliance expects of development businesses. Given that creativity entails using new and appropriate ways to respond to uncertainties and ill-defined problems (Nayak, 2008), my study explores the approach to creativity that GoTravel has adopted.

Now that I have introduced my research, I outline the specific research questions that underlie my study.

## 1.5 Research Questions

My core research question is: What is the nature and processes of creativity in small businesses?

The sub-questions I studied in line with the above core question are

- 1) What is the nature of creativity in GoTravel and what implications do creativity in GoTravel have for its creative processes?
- 2) How are creative processes constructed by GoTravel?

My study begins with an indicative background discussion of creativity in GoTravel, the small business at the centre of my study, to set the scene for an investigation into how it organised its creative processes. Creativity 'in' organisations entails the development of new and useful ideas within an organisation by

employees, and has been the main discussion point by organisational creativity researchers (Nisula, 2013). To study creativity in organisations, researchers often use variance-based approaches to examine how organisational structures or work environments affect employee creativity. In my thesis, I similarly examine how the organisational structure, or factors within GoTravel's work environment may have affected employee creativity as mainstream researchers do. However, rather than aim at static conclusions on the small businesses' creativity from this discussion in similar ways as mainstream researchers, I use my discussions here to establish the context for a more detailed discussion of GoTravel's creative processes. Specifically, based on my social constructionist understanding of organisational reality, I ask how organisational members' experiences of trying to develop new and useful ideas within the organisation may have provoked, if not enabled, social interactions and activities that the small business subsequently engaged in, to develop new and useful ideas (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2009).

The second research question proceeds to explore the resulting approach GoTravel used to organise processes that can possibly lead to new and useful ideas. That is, creativity 'by' the organisation (Nisula, 2013). Creativity by organisations, relatively under researched in current scholarship of organisational creativity, considers the organisation rather than individuals or groups as the unit of analysis (Fortwengel et al., 2017; Drazin et al., 1999). Consequently, studying creativity 'by' the organisation may include, but is not limited to, employee creative activities inside the organisation. It entails how organisations, in themselves, engage in novel and appropriate processes within and outside their immediate firm boundaries that can

result in novel and relevant solutions to internal or external problems. To address these questions, I organised my thesis around eight core chapters as follows.

## 1.6 Organisation of Chapters

The two chapters that follow on from here, Chapter 2 and 3, contain my background literature. In Chapter 2, I map out current scholarly thinking surrounding organisational creativity. I draw attention to the fact that while there has been a necessary shift from conceptualising creativity as a personality trait to a social process, much of what we know remains around individuals and teams within organisations, precisely how organisations and their internal work environment can support creative behaviour of their employees. These enduring lines of research have been extended by functionalist researchers who take a variance approach to studying organisational creativity. On the other hand, I build on research ideas of few researchers, whose marginal but useful works suggest that research lines mainstream researchers have occupied themselves with are not sufficient to grasp the complex and multiple ways organisational creativity manifests. In fact, it appears that due to certain lines of discussion propagated by mainstream researchers, the ways small businesses come to develop new and useful ideas has not been sufficiently accounted for.

I continue my discussion of existing literature in Chapter 3 by paying special attention to organisational creativity in the context of small businesses. Here I discuss the few researches on creativity undertaken specifically in the context of small businesses and highlight lines of enquiry that remain understudied. I also explore a mix of strengths and constraints that make such businesses unique, and

may influence the ways in which they enact their creative processes. I suggest that their contradictory organisational environment, that is, in terms of how their characteristics (e.g. size and resource-constraints) influence developing new and useful ideas, presents an enlightening context to study and thus, improve current knowledge of organisational creativity.

In the next half of the chapter, I raise discussions to argue that entrepreneurship studies offer much promise in shedding light on the creative processes that small businesses use to develop new and useful ideas. This is primarily because the processes that underlie both entrepreneurship and small businesses' creativity are motivated by a lack of essential inputs on the one hand, and a need to search and bring together these inputs to create new value, on the other hand. In my discussions, I pay particular attention to the work of Hjorth (2004; 2005) and research in co-creation of value (Cova et al., 2011; Bonsu & Darmody, 2008). Hjorth's conception of entrepreneurship as a process of creating spaces for 'play' and invention seems to resonate with the ways in which small businesses, who are usually constrained, can nonetheless build new and useful ideas through deliberate processes they organise and engage in. Additionally, I suggest that research in co-creation offers insights into some of the activities of 'play' that small businesses may engage in to accomplish their goals of developing new and useful products.

The methodology chapter, Chapter 4, describes empirical decisions I took to gain deeper insights into my case organisation, their product users and the interactions between them that were relevant to my learning of creative processes



in GoTravel and in small businesses in general. I start the chapter by discussing the relevance of the social constructionist approach in my research of the processes of creativity in small software businesses. Here, I build on the work of current scholars who emphasise the social nature of creativity to underscore how the creative process entails daily constructions and interventions of human and non-human actors towards possible new creations. I follow this first part of my discussion with the actual methods used to collect data. Here, I discuss why out of four available qualitative methodologies, I chose a qualitative case study to study the nature and processes of creativity by small businesses. I proceed to discuss my methods of data collection, which include interviews, observations, email conversations and website information. The ways I used and analysed the empirical information I gathered using my methods of data collection is the next point I discuss. Specifically, I discuss how I analysed my data to generate narrative headings, which I used to present a story of my view of GoTravel's creative processes. I also discuss ethical implications and considerations linked to my empirical study.

In Chapter Five, I use the data I collected to present my perspective of GoTravel's creative processes in the form of a story. My story is centred on a small businesses' attempt to create opportunities where new and improved software solutions can be developed. It shows the challenges and paradoxes that seemed to make this task a difficult one in the organisation, and the consequent ways and locations the small business sought to create fertile opportunities where new and relevant ideas for the software could be generated. I suggest in my story that this entailed making industry norms to collaborate more with product users, into new uses where they could engage in social interactions to create new ideas. I also use

my discussions in this chapter for a second purpose of suggesting the relevance of storytelling to a fine-grained account of how creative processes may unfold overtime. This fluidity is opposed to the static accounts of organisational creativity that functionalist approaches, which dominate mainstream literature develop in their findings of the nature and processes of creativity.

I then move to my discussion chapter, chapter 6, where I discuss how GoTravel's organisational structure may have affected employee creativity. Specifically, three factors; company growth, leadership and time pressure seemed to have restricted the extent to which employees could generate new and useful ideas within the organisation. Nonetheless, I argue that the restrictions within the organisation were also useful in shaping the ways the organisation organised processes to facilitate building new and useful ideas. Specifically, the awareness by organisational members, particularly, management that they could not sufficiently support employee creativity within the work environment, signalled the need to seek new locations where creative ideas could be developed. For instance, one of the considerations for consequently organising the creative process was to seek environments that were fertile with creativity-relevant resources. The discussions in Chapter 6, while setting the scene for an informed analysis of the subsequent ways GoTravel approached processes for the generation of new and useful ideas are also used to bring to the fore limitations of mainstream literature in organisational creativity. This mainstream literature, detailed in Chapter 2, is underpin by functionalist orientations and thus, usually seeks static conclusions in creativity research by concentrating on organisational conditions that are supportive or not for employee creativity. In contrast to this straightforward view of organisational

creativity, I argue in this chapter that the organisational structure of the small business was embraced by the small business and made to serve a more dynamic role of defining how and where to undertake activities and processes towards potentially new creations in response to identified problems.

In the second part of the chapter, I discuss subsequent ways GoTravel, and perhaps other small businesses, tactically enact processes that could lead to building new and useful ideas. I suggest that this entailed capitalising on intimate relationships with product users to access resources that were needed for generating new and relevant software solutions. Specifically, GoTravel diverted collaborations the software industry required them to have with product users to other uses with potential to develop creative outcomes. These other uses entailed interactions which could offer ways to access relevant resources, such as new ideas, industry knowledge, time and freedom to conceive of new ideas, and money from product users. This behaviour by the small business, of making new uses out of what appears to be limitations in their external environment seems to resonate with Hjorth's description of entrepreneurial processes. Thus, to explore further GoTravel's creative processes, I draw on Hjorth's concepts to examine how they re-appropriated the 'place' they shared with their product users into 'spaces' that support activities of 'play' relevant for building outcomes that depart from those common to the agile-inspired environment.

In Chapter 7, I bring together core themes from chapters 1 to 6 to conclude my research and understanding of creativity in small businesses. I highlight the main contributions of this research to organisational creativity literature to be a detailed

analysis and hence, fine-grained understanding of creative processes of small businesses. While my research develops some very interesting findings, I also identify limitations of my study in this chapter and questions for further research. I end the chapter with a reflection of how I have been influenced by this research, and how I may also have influenced this research.

## **2 CURRENT APPROACHES TO STUDYING ORGANISATIONAL CREATIVITY**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In Chapter One, I presented a brief overview of my research, referring to four key areas; the reasons for my research interest in small businesses' creativity, why I believe research on creative processes, particularly in small software businesses is beneficial to current knowledge of organisational creativity, research questions driving my study, and my selective use of existing definitions of creativity to guide my research.

The purpose of this chapter and the next is to review relevant literature for my research. My overall aim is to develop a theoretical basis on which I can proceed with my thesis on the nature and process of creativity among small businesses. Specifically, I seek to argue that creative processes that can potentially lead to building new and useful solutions to address organisational problems, may be most appropriately studied as dynamic and ongoing interactions among a number of actors, within and around organisations. This is opposed to the straightforward causal relationship functionalist researchers, whose thinking pervade the field, seek to establish between sets of dependent (individual's creative outcomes) and independent variables (contextual factors).

To develop my argument, I have divided my review of literature into two chapters. In the current one, I discuss mainstream approaches to studying creativity in order to highlight current scholarly thinking on organisational creativity. Here, I draw attention to how variance-based approaches, underpin by functionalist and managerial orientations, underpin the bulk of research in the field. Led by social

psychologists, such approaches usually emphasise the relationship between contextual factors within organisations (such as, leadership and availability of resources like time and freedom) and the creative behaviour of organisational members (individuals and groups). In addition, within variance-based research, the creative process is conceptually regarded as a stable set of cognitive processes that individual's use to develop new and useful ideas (Amabile & Pratt, 2016, Sternberg, 2012, Amabile & Mueller, 2008).

While I acknowledge the usefulness of these studies, I also note and discuss their limited relevance to a more nuanced approach in explaining other possible dimensions of the ways organisations may manifest creativity. In particular, I note how their emphasis on creativity as an outcome of a set of internal organisational resources and structures, brackets out the creative ways organisations like small businesses, which struggle to develop such resources, come to develop new creations. Organisational creativity, I suggest in this chapter, goes beyond providing an environment where employees' creative behaviours are encouraged. It includes a range of dynamic activities occurring in the interactive spaces within and beyond organisational boundaries, which influence opportunities for novel ideas to emerge.

In the next half of the chapter, I move on to discuss the works of few researchers (Drazin et al., 1999; Martin, 2009; Banks et al., 2003), whose marginal, but significant, works have offered alternative ways to study and extend knowledge on organisational creativity. Usually taking an interpretative approach to research, these researchers suggest the need to open alternative possibilities for studying the complex ways organisations enact processes that may lead to the generation of

imaginative responses. Without such an open-ended approach, they argue, certain relevant themes will remain peripheral in current knowledge, due to hegemonic discourses that are currently projected by researchers from psychology disciplines (Blomberg, 2014).

On the basis of common lines of discussion underlying this marginal literature, I create an opening for the next chapter. There, I show how particular characteristics of small businesses may guide creative actions by such businesses, , and suggest interpretive lenses that can potentially illuminate the dynamic activities and interactions that underpin such processes.

## 2.2 Organisational Creativity – Major Milestones in Research Perspectives

Early research on creativity focused on prominent creative individuals (Gomes et al., 2016). Researchers believed creativity was intrinsic to a reserved few people; that certain individuals have unique traits that prompt particular patterns of behaviour (such as assertiveness and tolerance for ambiguity) favourable for creative actions. The preoccupation of researchers was to identify these behavioural patterns by studying the lives of geniuses, such as Leonardo da Vinci, Beethoven, and Newton, from whom they could learn more about the creative person, and by extension the concept of creativity (Drevdahl & Cattell, 1958). For instance, Simonton (1999) proposed a Darwinian perspective of creativity, arguing that studying the life of Charles Darwin could provide deeper knowledge into the nature of creativity.

However, a number of convergent findings from relatively recent studies have suggested the need to look beyond intrinsic personality traits in accounting for individuals' creative outputs. For example, genetic studies (Reuter et al., 2006) found that genes and personality traits account for only 10% of the variability in the potential for individuals to engage in creative activities. Next, scholars who vouch for the role of personality traits in individual's ability to develop new and useful ideas admit that over long periods, carefully planned interventions can support any personality type to engage in activities that can possibly lead to the generation of new and useful ideas to an extent (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2015). In addition, recently some studies based on trait-based approaches found a complex, rather than straightforward, pattern of relationships between personality traits and creative behaviour. For instance, Raja and Johns (2010) examined how the Big Five personality dimensions (conscientiousness, openness to experience, agreeableness, extraversion, and neuroticism) interact with job scope (overall design of a job) to influence individual creativity. They found that when job scope was high, neuroticism was negatively related to individual creativity. On the other hand, when job scope was high, there was no interaction with conscientiousness to predict individual creativity. Their findings suggest that the work environment (represented by job scope in their study) plays a mediating role in determining individuals' engagement in acts considered 'creative'.

Prompted by a similar awareness, some social psychologists started drawing attention to the limits of just intrinsic personality factors in explaining individual creative behaviour. They considered the trait approach as:



‘incomplete, creativity is best conceptualized not as a personality trait or a general ability but as a behaviour resulting from particular constellations of personal characteristics, cognitive abilities, and social environment’ (Amabile, 1983: 358).

This shift in perspective became particularly important in the 1980s as more attention started being paid to creativity in the workplace. Here, scholars found the ontology of creativity as an inherent trait insufficient for studying and managing the process of developing new and useful ideas in organisations. For instance, the assumption that creativity could be a trait of select individuals seemed to discourage employers from seeking ways to nurture the creative potential of employees who did not exhibit those traits. The result was little or no effort by managers in providing a work environment that would actively encourage creative behaviour among employees. Managers rather relied on the luck of recruiting creative persons to whom the responsibility of developing creative solutions could be vested (Amabile & Pillemer, 2012).

In developing a more relevant understanding of creativity in the workplace, scholars brought into research discussions non-dispositional influences that interact with factors within individuals to facilitate their engagement in creative behaviour. Theories that have emerged from such discussions, usually referred to as confluence theories, underlie the bulk of current work done to advance research on creativity at the workplace (Sternberg & Kaufman, 2010). The most popular among these, cited in a recent review of the creativity and innovation literature, are the ‘componential model of individual creative action’, ‘the investment approach’ and the ‘interactionist perspective of creativity’ (Anderson et al., 2014).

Because of the prevalence of such perspectives in current knowledge of organisational creativity, I start my discussion of relevant literature with them to draw attention to the state-of-the-science in creativity research. In this way, I am able to evaluate the relevance of current scholarly thinking on organisational creativity for my research in small business contexts. In addition, I focus on confluence approaches to examine and build on certain views they hold on the nature of creativity in my own research. For instance, their recognition of the role that factors external to individuals play in individual's ability to come up with new and useful ideas provide an impetus to advance my research in explaining creativity in organisational contexts (as I attempt to shift focus from factors within individuals). Secondly, by acknowledging interactions between individuals and their work environment, they advance notions of the social nature of creativity, a view which underlies my research.

Perhaps one of the most important points to note from the confluence theories I discuss below is that they have been developed by micro-organisational behaviour theorists whose views on the nature of creativity are premised on functionalist orientations (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). Micro-organisational behaviour scholars, in general, adopt reductionist approaches to study organisational phenomena. They focus on a study of the constituent parts of the organisation, usually individuals and groups to understand organisational behaviour as a whole (Montuori, 2011). Accordingly, they consider creativity of organisations to reside in the creative potential and activities of its employees (Bowen, 2004; Zhou & Hoever, 2014). In addition, because of their functionalist orientations, mainstream researchers define creativity principally in terms of outcomes, emphasising that engagement in creative

activities should lead to new and useful ideas or solutions (Amabile & Pratt, 2016; Woodman et al., 1993).

As shown below, the functionalist orientations that underlie mainstream approaches to studying organisational creativity have naturally led to an undue emphasis on particular lines of discussion, which do not address other important aspects and dimensions of organisational creativity. More precisely, they usually adopt variance-based approaches to study appropriate work conditions that can foster creative behaviour among individuals and groups within organisations without much focus on the actual processes organisations use to generate new and useful ideas (Fortwengel et al., 2017).

Having provided an overview of how research on organisational creativity has evolved over the years, I now proceed to provide a detailed discussion of some theories that currently dominate the field.

### 2.3 Prevailing Theories of Organisational Creativity

In Table 2.1 below, I list major theories of mainstream creativity research. This is to provide an overview of factors researchers have raised to explain individual creativity in light of the shift from personality traits to the relationship between traits and context. I follow this with a brief discussion of the first three theories and move on to a detailed discussion of the fourth, Amabile's Componential Model, due to its popularity and extensive coverage of the factors that are considered to be essential for organisational creativity.

**Table 2.1: Confluence Theories of Creativity**

<b>Creativity Theory</b>	<b>How creativity is defined</b>	<b>Factors</b>	<b>Authors</b>
<b>Investment framework of creativity</b>	Creativity is the ability to produce work that is both novel and appropriate	Intellectual Ability, knowledge, styles of thinking (especially legislative style of thinking), personality, motivation, and environment.	(Sternberg, 2012, Sternberg & Lubart, 1999, Sternberg, 2006)
<b>Interactionist framework of creativity</b>	The creation of a valuable, useful new product, service, idea, procedure, or process by individuals working together in a complex social system	Individual creativity (antecedent conditions, creative behaviour, cognitive style/abilities, personality), group creativity (knowledge, intrinsic motivation, social influences, contextual influences), organisational creativity (group composition, group characteristics and group processes)	(Woodman et al., 1993)
<b>Model of individual creativity action</b>	Domain-specific, subjective judgment of the novelty and value of an outcome of a particular action.	Sense-making processes, motivation, and knowledge and skills	Ford (1996)
<b>Componential theory of creativity</b>	The production of novel and useful ideas by an individual or small group of individuals working together	Intra-individual factors (creativity relevant processes, task motivation, skills in the task domain) and factors within the work environment	Amabile & Pratt, (2016); Amabile et al, (1996); Amabile (1988)

Source: Compiled from Multiple Literature Sources

In the investment framework of creativity, Sternberg (2010: 87; 1992) likens creativity to an economic investment where the 'creator' of an idea 'buys low and sells high'. Buying low involves coming up with promising ideas that are unfamiliar to people in a particular domain. With persistence and the ability to convince others of the potential worth of such ideas, creators 'sell high', that is, they gain support and positive outcomes from their ideas. According to Stenberg (2012), a confluence of six factors determine an individual's ability to come up with ideas that significantly depart from existing ways, the ability to win the support of others and resultantly, the ability to sell high. The six factors are intellectual ability, knowledge, styles of thinking (especially legislative style of thinking), personality, motivation and environment.

The interactionist perspective of creativity (Woodman et al., 1993) views organisational creativity as complex interactions between individuals and conditions in their immediate work context at different levels of the organisation (the individual level, the group level, and the organisational level). Some examples of relevant factors at the individual level are cognitive abilities and personality. At the group level, cohesiveness, diversity, and roles are important while at the organisational level, factors relevant for creativity include resources, culture and technology. Thus, for instance, an individual's personality will interact with social influences, such as diversity of the group, and factors within the organisational context, such as available resources, to determine the context for creative behaviour of employees (both individuals and groups). One way this theory differs from the rest is its recognition of the potential effects that factors outside the control of the organisation have on creativity. In this sense, Woodman et al. (1993) note the effect that economic and

social factors within the external environment have on creative behaviour within organisations. While Woodman et al. (1993) recognise the external environment in their conception, it is worth noting that they only consider it in terms of how relevant social and economic factors influence organisational level resources that are available for employee creativity. In this sense, the internal environment of the organisation, remains the main site of creative action.

Ford's (1996) theory of individual creative action suggests that an individual's tendency to engage in creative actions (rather than ordinary routine actions) depends on three factors: sense-making processes (such as problem finding orientation), motivation (driven by factors such as goals and beliefs regarding whether creativity will be rewarded or not) and knowledge and skills (such as diverse experience, social networking skills and communication skills). Ford (1996) suggests that these factors interact iteratively in a complex way to influence an individual's decision to either engage in a creative or habitual response when confronted with a problem.

When these theories are placed within the context of organisations, researchers consider that organisations' ability to develop new and useful ideas will depend on the creative activities of employees, which will, in turn, depend on the presence of the factors they have identified. Individual's engagement in activities that may lead to new and useful ideas is however not merely a computational sum of the different factors (Stenberg, 2012). For instance, in his investment framework of creativity, Stenberg explained that a lower than average presence of certain components, such as knowledge, will make it impossible for people to generate creative ideas no matter the proportions of other components present. On the other

hand, it is possible for weaknesses in certain components, say environment, to be compensated for by a strength in motivation (Sternberg, 2012).

In what follows, I focus particularly on Amabile's componential model (Amabile, 1983; Amabile, 1988; Amabile, 1996; Amabile & Pratt, 2016), which prevails as the major model to explain organisational creativity for several reasons (Gomes et al., 2016). First, the componential model has served as the foundation for other popular theories of creativity including those briefly explained above (Fortwengel et al., 2017). In a recent update to the model, Amabile and Pratt (2016) incorporated nuances from subsequent works by other researchers (such as by Woodman et al, 1993) that pointed to gaps in the initial 1983 model. She suggested that the addition of the new insights had led to a more dynamic and comprehensive model of creativity. Because of recent updates, the Componential Model is the most current model of organisational creativity. Secondly, Amabile's Model is the most extensive when it comes to factors deemed essential by mainstream researchers for being important to individual creativity, and hence organisational creativity (Gomes et al., 2016). Finally, the Componential Model is popular for being one of the few creativity models that expatiate on processes of coming up with new and useful ideas, albeit at the individual level.

For these reasons, my discussion of Amabile's Componential Model in the next section offers a useful overview of current scholarly thinking surrounding organisational creativity. This, in turn, helps to assess how creativity in the context of small businesses is accounted for in mainstream discussions.

## 2.4 Amabile's Componential Model

The bulk of research by Amabile in past decades have centred on two main lines of discussion: an understanding of the motivation that underlies individual creativity and ways the organisational context, or work environment, influences individual creative behaviour. These interests underlie her theory (2012, 1988, 1983), which remains one of the most widely cited in studies of creativity within organisations. It is important to note that Amabile's Componential Model, as is typical of most theories of creativity, has been developed from empirical studies of children, individual artists or large business corporations (Rosso, 2014). Thus, the components that make up the model may be most reflective of these contexts.

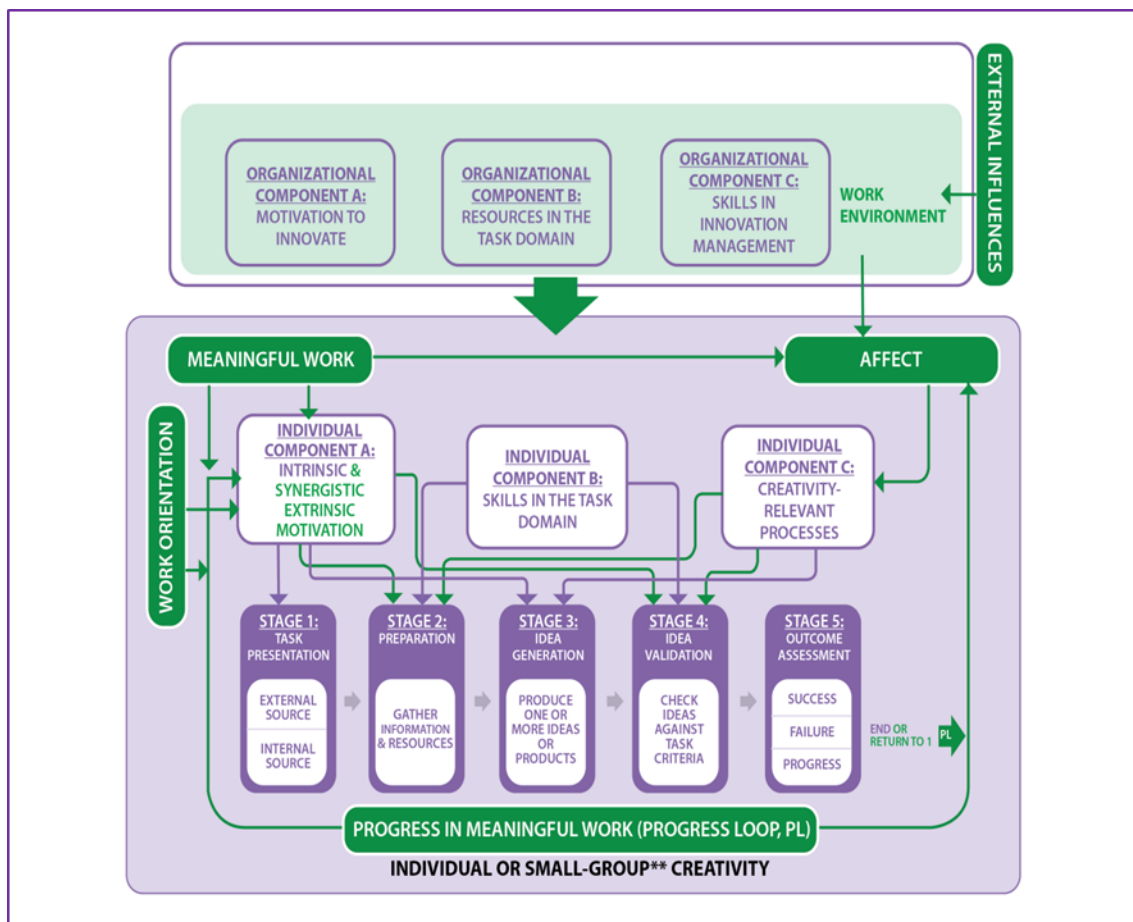
The model identifies four components (influencers) considered to be essential for individual's creative process and outcomes. The components are domain relevant skills, creativity-relevant processes, task motivation (components within the individual) and the social environment (component external to the individual). These components have varying effects on five stages of the creative process identified to include the problem identification stage, preparation stage, response generation stage, response validation or outcome stage and communication of ideas stage.

A current version of the model draws on a number of research works conducted in the past 28 years by other researchers (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). The updated version includes four new psychological constructs important for creativity: affect, work meaningfulness, a sense of progress in meaningful work and synergistic extrinsic motivation (Amabile & Pratt, 2016).



In what follows I discuss the model's assumptions and discuss its components, aided by a diagrammatic presentation of the key aspects in Figure 2.1. Purple items in the figure represent the original 1988 componential model. Green items represent current additions or modifications. I start my discussions with the assumptions of the model because, it is partly based on them that the model, which was originally targeted at individual creative action, has been suggested as relevant for explaining organisational creativity.

Figure 2.1: Adaptation of The Componential Model of Creativity



Source: Adapted from Amabile & Pratt (2016)

#### 2.4.1 Model Assumptions

Amabile (2012) identified two main assumptions of the Componential Model that respond to problems left open by the trait approach discussed in Section 2.2. One is that creativity varies in extent, from incremental responses directed at mundane problems to radical actions that address significant problems. Here, Amabile's theory considers creativity as ranging from the broad continuum of creative actions from Big-C to little-c creativity. Big C creativity emphasises 'major breakthrough' creative actions carried out by eminent and creative individuals, such as Sir Isaac Newton, who is famous for the discovery of gravity. On the other hand, little-c creativity is concerned with less impactful changes which are applied to solving problems on a daily basis (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2007). The second assumption of the model is that creative works of any individual vary in extent from one period to the other even when the individuals operate in the same domain. Thus, the difference in the level of creativity exhibited by any one person is an outcome of how the components outlined in the theory operate at the time of their creative behaviour. For example, a software developer may develop a revolutionary idea today and suggest another idea on a different day that has, at most, minimal impact depending on which components are present and how they interact.

Given both assumptions, Amabile argues that each individual with normal cognitive abilities has the potential to engage in some sort of creative behaviour when there is an opportunity and environment that supports such behaviour. Consequently, organisation's effective management of certain factors, such as motivation, freedom, and leadership, should in principle offer employees more

opportunities to be creative than they may otherwise be. This is then expected to reflect in the organisation's ability to develop new and useful outcomes (Amabile, 1983).

I now move to discuss the four components of the Componential Model and how they relate to the processes of coming up with new and useful ideas, according to Amabile.

#### 2.4.2 Four Components of Creativity in Organisations

The first component is domain relevant skills, represented in Figure 1 as Component B. According to Amabile, domain-relevant skills are the know-how needed to work in a specific work context. This know-how, usually in the form of skills and expertise gained on a job or applied to a job from experience, is firm-specific knowledge that distinguishes one organisation's knowledge employees from another. For instance, the domain relevant skills for a software developer will include coding and programming skills as well as knowledge on how to debug (identify and solve errors) faulty software.

The second component that influences individual creativity, and hence organisation's potential for building original products, according to Amabile, is creativity relevant processes, shown as Component C in Figure 1. It includes the cognitive style and personality characteristics that support behaviours favourable to creativity (Perry-Smith, 2006). Examples of creativity-relevant processes are risk-taking, divergent and adaptable thinking and remote association. As indicated earlier, this was the long-standing focus of early research on creativity. Amabile

provides an extension in her model by examining how these processes interact with the immediate environment of the individual to support the development of creative outcomes (Amabile, 2012).

The third component that may determine the level of an individual's ability to come up with new and useful ideas is task motivation. This could either be from intrinsic or extrinsic sources. Intrinsic motivators could come from a sense of challenge on the job, genuine interest in one's task and feelings of accomplishment. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is tied to any motivational source that is external to the individual (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). Sources of extrinsic motivation include rewards like an increase in pay and external directives to perform tasks in particular ways. While intrinsic motivation is always conducive to employee creativity, extrinsic motivation will only be beneficial for employee creativity under conditions when employees do not feel they are being controlled. For instance, time pressure may motivate employees to work but inhibit creative behaviour because employees may feel controlled (Amabile & Pratt, 2016).

The fourth component that influences individual creativity is the social environment. This is concerned with factors within an individual's work environment. It is represented in Figure 1 by the work orientation and components within the organisation (organisational motivation to innovate, resources in the task domain of the organisation and skills in innovation management). Thus, in contrast to the first three components, which focus on factors within the individual, this component is external to the individual. The social environment appears to be the most important of all the components since it affects all the three components, and in turn, influences willingness and the ability of employees to come up with new and useful ideas. Thus,

most empirical studies that have been developed based on Amabile's Componential Model have treated factors within the work environment as independent variables that interact with the three other components to determine individual creative action. Examples of factors within the work environment that are necessary for individual's engagement in creative activities include leadership, the attitude of colleagues, organisational resources, organisational culture and the extent organisations emphasise the status quo (Amabile, 1998).

In sum, Amabile, using a variance-based approach, considers creativity to be a dependent outcome of the ways in which the contextual environment of the individual affects their abilities to engage in creative behaviour (Fortwengel et al, 2017).

According to her conceptualisation, researchers seeking an understanding of organisational creativity should examine how the four components interact with each other and the creative process within the firms they study. Thus, I move to the second aspect of the componential theory, the creative process (represented by the five boxes at the bottom of Figure 1) in order to explain the effects the four components have on its stages and outcomes.

#### 2.4.3 The Creative Process

Amabile, similar to the theorists whose works I have already discussed, adopts a micro-organisational behaviour view of organisational creativity. Therefore, in defining the creative process, she focuses on individuals and teams' processes towards developing new ideas. She thus defines the creative process as 'all the

cognitive processes that contribute to the production of creative works' (Amabile and Mueller, 2008: 37). In this sense, she also echoes early conceptualisations of creative processes, which focused on individual mental activities. For example, Wallas (1926) identified preparation (or problem finding), incubation, illumination (where a solution is developed) and verification as the main stages of the individual creative process. He explained that the middle stages of incubation and illumination usually occur when the creative person is not conscious of their actions. After actively seeking information that might be relevant to solve the problem at hand, the individual enters a sort of 'creative coma' where s/he unconsciously seeks solutions to the problem until the 'eureka' moment when a promising idea occurs. The creator then returns to a conscious state to test the usefulness of the idea to the problem at hand.

In the Componential Model, Amabile departs from Wallas' model by arguing that the process that individuals take to develop new and useful ideas is a social one, which draws on the consciousness of creative individuals as well as other actors who have a stake in what is being created (Amabile, 2012).

Amabile (1983) considers the creative process to entail five stages, all of which are influenced, to different degrees, by the aforementioned components. The first stage entails defining the problem that requires a creative (new and useful) input. Sources of problems vary from one organisation to the other and are usually determined by factors, such as industry trends and the kind of business an organisation is involved in. The component with the highest influence at this first stage of the creative process is task motivation. This is because, task motivation

influences what the individual perceives as a problem and their decision of whether the identified problem is worth tackling.

The next stage in the process according to Amabile (2012), involves activities undertaken to prepare a solution to tackle the problem. This stage entails putting together information, skills, and capabilities that can be used to address the problem. Here, domain-relevant skills, one of the listed components, play the most influential role. Thus, an individual's knowledge of their domain becomes a reservoir from which they can draw skills and abilities that are essential in solving the problem at hand.

At the third stage of the creative process, creators begin to articulate ideas relevant to the task at hand. Task motivation once again plays an important role as it encourages individuals to engage in processes that can support the development of useful ideas to address the problem. Another important component at this stage is creativity relevant processes, which ensure that individuals have the personality characteristics essential to develop new and needed ideas.

At the fourth stage, Amabile (2012) identified a need to test ideas, which may have been realised from activities in the previous stages. Testing ideas is done by carrying out authentication procedures to validate selected solutions. At this stage, domain-relevant processes are central as they provide a yardstick against which new ideas can be evaluated against the criteria of usefulness and novelty.

Finally, at the fifth stage, the solution that is generated is communicated to an internal (usually colleagues and management) and external audience (usually potential users of the solution and industry gatekeepers). The social environment is

an important component at the fifth stage, as it indicates how receptive the organisation will be to the response or solution developed.

The description of the creative process put forward by Amabile has served an important addition to our understanding of creativity, particularly within the workplace. For instance, by presenting the creative process as a stable set of individual cognitive processes, Amabile's work, similar to other stage theories, offers possibilities for organisations to draw up a coherent strategy for managing individual-level processes (Hjorth et al., 2015).

Taken as a whole (that is, considering the effect the four components have on individual processes of creativity), the Componential Model suggests that organisations will realise new and useful ideas when all the four components are present, as necessary, during the stages of the individuals' creative process. In the authors' words, 'creativity should then be highest when an intrinsically motivated person with high domain expertise and high skill in creative thinking works in an environment high in support for creativity' (Amabile & Mueller, 2008 p.37).

Even though Amabile's model was originally developed based on individual creativity, it has also been applied to the study of creativity among teams and groups in organisations. This in part, accounts for suggestions that the model is a useful one for explaining organisational creativity. Thus, before I move on to examine the relevance of the model to my research on creativity among small businesses, I briefly discuss its application to teams and groups.



## 2.5 Group and Team creativity

As discussions on the appropriate environment for individual creativity have unfolded, a parallel stream of research has emerged on teams and groups in organisations. These developments have arisen based on two reasons; firstly, that businesses are increasingly organising their activities around teams (Paulus & Yang, 2000), and secondly, that teams and groups are more structured to develop the quality of ideas needed to address complex demands of contemporary organisations compared to lone creators (Rigolizzo & Amabile, 2015). The latter view is backed by the notion that individual members of teams and groups bring on board unique skills and perspectives to develop creative solutions that are effective for addressing organisational problems (Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003).

Thus, in recent versions of the componential model, Amabile has gone further to suggest how her model may be useful in explaining creativity at other levels of analysis, including teams and groups, rather than at just the individual level (Amabile, 2012). This is based on evidence suggesting that similar processes at the individual level may apply to groups. For instance, Kahai et al. (2003) found creativity-relevant processes (such as frequency of cooperation and amount of participation) among groups they studied.

Due to its suggested relevance of explaining organisational creativity at the individual and group levels, the Componential Model, is considered useful in explaining creativity at the level of the organisation.

To summarise my discussion till this point, current knowledge of organisational creativity is heavily shaped by social psychology researchers. I have

thus undertaken a detailed review of Amabile's componential model, which is a quintessential social psychology model of creativity and currently the most cited organisational creativity model (partly due to its extensive coverage of relevant-creativity components), to set out current scholarly thinking around creativity in organisational contexts. According to the model, individual creativity is a confluence of four components, namely; work environment, intrinsic and synergistic extrinsic motivation, skills in the task domain and creativity relevant processes. While the first is external to the individual, the remaining three are all within individuals.

As noted in the beginning, a central assumption of her work and the bulk of creativity studies taking a micro-OB approach is that organisations potential for building new and useful products is found in its people. Thus, for managers who seek to promote their organisations' ability to create imaginative responses and solutions for their markets, the bulk of prevailing work suggests fostering a work environment that is conducive for the three factors within the individual to flourish. When this is done, they argue, individuals and groups will more likely engage in activities that may lead to building imaginative solutions and increase the creativity of their respective organisations.

The next part of this chapter reflects on the central ideas of mainstream theories of creativity, in particular, Amabile's Componential Model. As noted, this is to evaluate their relevance to my learning of creativity by small businesses.

## 2.6 Problematising Prevailing Organisational Creativity Literature

Before I move on to problematise the variance-based perspectives raised so far, which I have argued reflects the bulk of current research in the field, it may be worth, briefly, highlighting the pervasiveness of such perspectives. This is necessary to support my focus on them as a useful starting point for my discussion of existing literature, as well as the need to problematise, and hence create possibilities for fresh orientations in research. To do this, I have studied existing reviews done in the area of organisational creativity, in a process similar to what Theodoratou et al. (2014) call an umbrella review. An umbrella review evaluates multiple systematic reviews done in an area of research to provide evidence of the scope and focus of research on a specific topic (Aromataris et al., 2015).

Most reviews done in organisational creativity research, summarised in Table 2.2 below, are in the form of traditional literature reviews, rather than systematic reviews. Thus, my 'umbrella review', is a review of literature reviews, rather than systematic reviews. To search for appropriate papers, I used a combination of the search terms 'review\*', 'systematic review\*', 'meta-analysis\*', 'literature\*' and 'creativity\*', to systematically search Web of Science, Emerald, Business Source Premier, Nexis, Science Direct and PsychINFO for existing reviews on organisational creativity. From this, I retrieved a total of nine articles. Because my aim was to identify the focus of work done in the broad area of organisational creativity, I set some inclusive criteria of articles that reviewed papers done in organisational creativity, and excluded articles that only reviewed papers on a specific aspect of creativity, such as, a review on the role of culture on organisational

Table 2.2: Overview of Literature Reviews on Organisational Creativity

Authors and Titles	Focus	Findings/Emphasis
Andriopoulos (2001) Determinants of organisational creativity	To review key factors that affect organisational creativity in order for organisations to promote creativity within their work environments	Key factors *Organisational climate *Leadership style *Organisational culture *Resources and skills *Structure and system of organisation
Gupta & Barnejee (2016) Antecedents of organisational creativity: a multi-level approach	A better understanding of the antecedents of organisational creativity with a multi-level approach in order to suggest how organisations can encourage creativity in their work environment	Multi-Level Individual creativity: Personality, intrinsic motivation, group cohesion, social inhibition, cognitive interference, leader-member exchange. Group creativity: group cohesiveness, group composition and group structure. Organisational creativity: organisational culture, policies, leadership, and resource allocation capacity
<u>Castillo-Vergara</u> et al. (2018) A bibliometric analysis of creativity in the field of business economics	To establish the results of creativity research in the scope of business economics	Findings *The most cited articles focus on creativity in the work environment within the organisation * The bulk of research is focused on performance of creativity within organisations
Klijn & Tomic (2010) A review of creativity within organisations from a psychological perspective	To survey the main creativity models, mediators as well as the enhancers of organizational creativity, all from a psychological perspective	Findings *Social psychologists have produced the bulk of theories and models on factors that affect creativity Individual: Personality traits Group: Group composition and processes Organisation: resource availability, reward policies, organisational mission, strategy
Zhou & Hoever (2014) Research on workplace creativity: a review and redirection	A review of literature in workplace creativity from 2000-2014 and redirection	Findings *Bulk of work done examines how work context interacts with actor characteristics * Majority of work examines factors that can have positive rather than negative effects on actor creativity
Amabile & Hennessey (2010) Creativity	Review on creativity research	Main Points *Organisational creativity research mirrors literature on creativity in general psychology * The bulk of applicable research reflects work done in social psychology *The primary focus is the impact of the work environment (created by leaders or managers) on actors (individual or teams) creativity.

creativity. I also excluded reviews done, which did not distinguish organisational creativity from innovation. The reviews listed in Table 2.2 illustrate the scope of the bulk of research done in the organisational creativity literature. As shown, emphasis is placed on the organisational environment as the main context for creativity. Accordingly, antecedents are conceptualised in terms of factors within the work environment, whether at the individual, group or organisational level, that interact with characteristics of actors (organisational members) to result in behaviours and actions generative of new ideas or solutions. In essence, organisational creativity is perceived as a reflection of successful engagement in creative actions by organisational members within the organisation (Fortwengel et al., 2017; Blomberg, 2014).

Returning now to problematising these perspectives, it is clear that Amabile's Componential Model and other variance - based approaches have been of significant relevance to the study and management of creativity in organisational contexts to date. This is partly due to their appeal to management scholars that managers can control or influence the creative performance of their organisations by manipulating conditions within the work environment (Bilton, 2010; Blomberg, 2016). In empirical studies, numerous researchers have paid attention to how contextual factors within organisations may interact with intrinsic factors of employees to shape organisations' ability to generate new and useful responses. For instance, some studies have found that work climate (Hunter et al., 2007; Ekvall, 1996), work culture (McLean, 2005) and leadership (Isaksen & Akkermans, 2011; Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2007), examples of factors within the work environment, may affect the extent to which employees engage in activities that can potentially

lead to relevant and original outcomes. Others focus explicitly on how personal and contextual factors interact to address the combined effects both have on creative behaviour. For instance, Hirst et al. (2009) pay attention to how employee creativity is affected by goal orientation of the firm and team learning behaviour.

There are still others whose studies provide specific empirical support for various aspects of the Componential Model. An example is Dimaunahan & Amora's (2016) study of creativity in micro, small and medium-sized restaurants in the Philippines. These authors run a partial least-squares structural equation modelling test on results from 133 respondents and found that respondents' work environment had a significant effect on domain-relevant skills, creative-relevant processes and intrinsic motivation which in turn affected the extent of creativity in these firms. In another study, Hirst et al. (2009) developed and tested a cross-level model of individual creativity among 25 R&D teams. Their findings confirmed the relevance of domain knowledge and skills to creativity.

Findings from a few studies contrast with ideas advanced by the componential theory, as well as other popular theories, pointing to the need for further research on how exactly the creative behaviour of employees is influenced by components of the model. For instance, Choi's (2004) research found that personality dispositions and factors within the work environment shape individual psychological processes but, may not directly affect their engagement in creative activities, such as spotting problems, exploring new solutions and generating new ideas. Similarly, in his study of the relationship between organisational structures and the creative process, Bowen (2004) concluded that making organisational structures more adaptable, such as through altering the work environment to be

more dynamic, or increasing employee autonomy, may not necessarily lead to an improvement in individual creative behaviour. These studies suggest that employee creativity may not directly be influenced by factors within the work environment as mainstream researchers postulate. In a sense, their findings seem to caution the extent we can rely on existing models, which emphasise interactions between contextual factors and factors intrinsic to employees, as the main means of learning about organisational creativity. Despite these opposing findings, on balance, the perspectives discussed above have received positive rather than negative empirical support.

For my research, I note two ways the research perspectives discussed so far may be beneficial. First, by emphasising interactions between employees and their work environments, the componential model and related scholarly thinking, in general, recognise the social nature of creativity, a perspective that underlies my own research. Second, Amabile's componential theory suggests the importance of attending to the processes of creativity even though she localises this to cognitive processes of individuals (and recently groups). Overall, Amabile's thinking provides a great deal of room to further explore organisational creativity, specifically, in how organisations experience creativity as a social and processual phenomenon.

While acknowledging the invaluable role the Componential Model, and other variance-based approaches play in current insights of creativity in the workplace, I consider that relying on their assumptions alone to study organisational creativity is a research approach that extends their focus beyond the analytical scope they can reasonably capture. This is principally because, organisational creativity is not merely individual or group/team creativity at work (Williams & Yang, 1999). In

addition to a creative organisation encouraging its employees to engage regularly in creative endeavours (as the Componential Model advises), organisations may also show remarkable creativity in other ways. For instance, creativity can manifest in the ways in which organisations themselves engage in actions towards gaining a competitive advantage using novel and useful means (Drazin et al., 1999; Nisula, 2013). However, as Fortwengel et al. (2017) have noted, the componential model, due to its strong emphasis on individual creativity, does not sufficiently offer an understanding of creativity as an organisational process.

Furthermore, among contemporary organisations, where traditional boundaries of the context of work activities are gradually becoming porous, organisations may seek more opportunities to engage in the development of creative products and services in the interactive spaces they share with their external environment (Chesbrough, 2006; Chesbrough et al., 2014). For this reason, factors within traditional firm boundaries, including employees and organisational structures, may gradually lose significance as the main determinants of the ways organisations organise activities towards building new and effective ideas. This awareness draws attention to the need for creativity researchers to be more 'creative' in learning about organisational creativity, by, for instance, reducing their fixation on the organisational context as the main or only site for building new and useful ideas. This is in line with Fortwengel et al.'s (2017: 18) argument that:

'extending our understanding of organisational creativity to span organisational boundaries as well as those of time and space will greatly advance theories of creativity as a social process occurring in and between organisations'.



I consider that studying organisational creativity in ways that are not limited to factors within organisations is particularly important when seeking to explain creative activities of organisations, which may have a relative paucity of 'creative individuals' (i.e. individuals who have favourable amounts of the intrinsic components in the componential model), or have demands that constantly compete for organisational resources (such as, time and money) needed for building new and useful ideas.

For instance, due to resource limitations small businesses experience (Berends et al., 2014), they may not be able to create a work environment that support building new and useful ideas internally in the ways the Componential Model and other popular approaches suggest. Yet, small businesses often need a regular inflow of new and useful ideas to compete favourably in their markets (Valaei et al., 2016). This would suggest the need to examine alternative explanations for the complex and alternative ways such organisations manifest their creativity.

In developing my research thesis, I consider a number of specific limitations of the Componential Model that need mentioning. First, the model presents the creative process as individual cognitive processes made up of a stable, linear and staged pattern of sequential activities. Although Amabile suggests that the listed stages of the process occur iteratively, she assumes that with time, they adopt some order and predictability (Fisher & Amabile, 2009). My suggestion, in line with Fortwengel et al. (2017), is that despite the widespread recognition in the literature of this view of the creative process, it only reflects scenarios of the ways individual members of organisations develop new and useful ideas. On the hand, this conceptualisation of the creative process does not fully show the ubiquitous, social

and processual actions that organisations engage in to create opportunities for building new ideas.

In fact, at the organisational level, the processes underlying efforts to build new and imaginative products may unfold in ways that are sensitive to both internal and external factors, and thus, cannot be categorised into discrete stages of occurrence. Similarly, it would appear, that at the level of the organisation, factors within the work environment, considered as static independent variables that influence individual's creative process by prevailing literature (Amabile & Pratt, 2016), will not necessarily serve a similar function. Instead, due to the complex nature of organisations, organisational structures, such as leadership and levels of hierarchy, may serve a more dynamic role of being resources that shape, if not enable, creative processes (Fortwengel et al., 2017; Sonenshein, 2014). In short, the processes organisations use to build new and useful ideas is much messier and complex, than can be reasonably represented using individuals as a level of analysis (Bilton, 2010).

Secondly, the social view of creativity, which Amabile and other micro-OB theorists sought to shed more light on (Amabile, 2012) remains under-researched. This is partly because they have mostly focused on how elements in the work environment interact and affect individual and group creative behaviour to examine the social nature of organisational creativity. However, this offers just one view of what makes creativity a social phenomenon. There are suggestions in the literature that identify other possible ways organisational creativity can manifest as a social activity. For instance, Perry-Smith & Shalley (2003) describe creativity as a social phenomenon in terms of how a person's social networks can influence their

engagement in creative actions. In addition, researchers suggest that creativity can be acted as a social phenomenon when 'different shaping forces' associated with the organisation and its internal and external actors across space, time and conceptual worlds interact to build new solutions and responses (Fisher et al., 2005: 483). These alternative conceptualisations suggest openings for possible ways to approach the study of creativity as a social phenomenon beyond what currently pertains in the extant literature.

Another limitation of the componential model, and indeed mainstream organisational creativity literature, comes from their definition of creativity principally in terms of outcomes, that is, new and useful outcomes (Amabile & Pratt, 2016; Sternberg, 2012). Owing to this definition, research efforts are often focused on identifying factors that may lead to such outcomes at the expense of a deeper understanding of organisational creative processes (Rosso, 2014). As noted in Chapter 1, although organisational processes aimed at generating novel outcomes may not necessarily lead to expected outcomes, they still warrant research attention to deepen current knowledge on how organisations develop new ideas. An understanding of organisational creative processes will also inform practice on how they can be managed for successful outcomes. In addition, such processes can be 'creative' in themselves, and their study can lead to a qualitatively different understanding of creativity than a focus on outcomes helps to achieve (Drazin et al., 1999).

Another limitation of prevailing models of organisational creativity, which makes them insufficient to explain creativity in small businesses relates to the contexts they have drawn empirical evidence from. Many studies that underlie

current theories of organisational creativity have been done in contexts that differ in nature from small business environments (Chilcott & Barry, 2016; Rosso, 2014). For instance, the componential model was originally developed from an investigation of creative behaviour among school children and individual artists, and later tested in R & D departments of large organisations (Amabile, 1996; Amabile 1988). Other studies done have been in behavioural laboratories (Zhou & Hoever, 2014). While such studies may sometimes include constructs relevant to organisations, such as job design (Amabile, 1988), they tend to model creativity as an activity that occurs distinctively or in isolation from real issues tied to real organisations. Where empirical evidence has been conducted in organisational contexts, the bulk of attention has been paid to large companies assuming that findings will similarly apply to small business contexts (Cokpekin & Knudsen, 2012). However, as I argue in the next chapter, the ways small businesses develop new and useful ideas are likely to differ significantly from those of larger businesses due primarily to differences in their characteristics and resources.

A final observation I make in terms of mainstream literature's inability to account fully for the ways businesses develop new and useful ideas is the fact that researchers have largely overlooked the dimension of 'time' in their accounts (Drazin et al., 1999). This is reflected in how scholars assume creativity to be a constant outcome when certain factors or components are present in the organisation, regardless of ongoing circumstances in and around the organisation. I suggest, given that humans and the systems they work in are constantly interacting with each other to produce and reproduce certain actions (Giddens, 2009), that the factors that are important for creativity at one time and place will significantly vary at another

time and place as relevant actors make meaning of new situations. Without recognition of the effect of time, Drazin and colleagues suggest that researchers continue to develop 'static models that emphasize explaining variance in the dependent variable (creative outcomes), rather than examining how the dynamic process of creativity unfolds over time' (Drazin et al., 1999: 289). The fact that creativity researchers often overlook dimensions of time seems to be particularly limiting in understanding organisational creativity of businesses that are highly vulnerable to external factors. In the case of small businesses, for instance, changes in factors within wider environments may shape the ways in which they organise processes relevant for building new and useful products or solutions.

So far, I have presented a discussion of mainstream approaches to studying creativity in organisational contexts by drawing attention to the fact that existing research is largely underpin by micro-OB and functionalist perspectives. As a result, I have noted that research is skewed towards effects that the work environment has on the creative behaviour and processes of individuals and teams within organisations. The second part of my discussion has then been aimed at identifying the limitations of this prevailing approach to knowledge of organisational creativity. Here, I have suggested that these limitations largely reduce the ability of existing research to account for creativity among small businesses.

Despite the aforementioned limitations, I do not intend to override mainstream research on organisational creativity. For one thing, some managers have successfully encouraged the creation of original products by providing a conducive working atmosphere for creative employees in the ways suggested by mainstream researchers (Gomes et al, 2016). Secondly, the conceptual perspective I propose in

the next chapter to study creativity among small businesses is partly aimed at complementing an understanding of the social and processual nature of creativity that researchers, such as Amabile, have highlighted.

However, my view is that organisational creativity is a complex phenomenon whose research has somewhat stalled due to what may be considered a 'hegemonic dominance of psychological conceptions' (Martin, 2009: 1). The repetitive lines of discussion that have emerged from such conceptions signal the need to widen the scope of organisational creativity research by tackling alternative dimensions that move beyond the components that have been discussed in the Componential Model. One of the central issues that my thesis addresses by seeking an alternative means to explore, study and understand organisational creativity is challenging the 'generic best practice' advice that has emerged from such studies (Hotho & Champion, 2011: 31).

Having discussed current scholarly thinking surrounding organisational creativity, I now move on, in the final part of the chapter, to examine few studies that have sought alternative approaches to extend understanding of organisational creativity.

## 2.7 Alternative Approaches to the Study of Organisational Creativity

Given the limitations of mainstream organisational creativity literature, few researchers have followed multiple trajectories to examine possible alternatives for learning about creativity in the context of organisations. My aim in this second part of the chapter is to use some of this marginal but significant literature, upon whose

works I have developed most of my critiques of mainstream literature above, as a bridge between the prevailing approaches and the development of a conceptual perspective for creativity in small businesses. The literature I discuss here introduces promising themes, such as social interactions that underlie creative processes at collective levels and creativity at multiple levels of analysis (as opposed to just the individual level of analysis), which I use to develop a conceptual perspective for exploring creative processes among small businesses in the next chapter.

Firstly, Nisula (2013) used multilevel approaches to extend current understanding of creativity from individual-level approaches within organisations to collective-level approaches (made up of creative processes by groups and organisations). In line with this aim, one of the main arguments Nisula made in her research was differentiating between creativity 'in' organisations from creativity 'by' organisations. Creativity in organisations, which has been the focus of mainstream creativity researchers, conceptualises creativity as an individual (or group) level cognitive construct related to idea generation within the organisation. Here, the role of the organisation is to provide a supportive environment for individual cognitive processes that are essential to coming up with new and useful ideas.

On the other hand, there is creativity by organisations which does not necessarily rely on the individual-level generation of new and useful ideas within organisations. According to Nisula, this other dimension of creativity, creativity at the level of organisations, entails the organisation engaging in creative actions to compete in its market. Here, creativity is seen as a social construction of novelty that shapes what organisations do and how they do it (Nisula, 2013). Drawing on the

knowledge-based view of the firm, Nisula explains how organisations, acting as knowledge systems draw from their reservoirs of knowledge to act in novel and relevant ways that set them apart from their competitors. In this sense, she defines organisational creativity as 'an ability of the organisation (knowledge system) to demonstrate novelty in its knowledgeable actions' (Nisula, 2013: 121). This view of creativity 'by' organisations seems particularly insightful in capturing the remarkable and imaginative ways certain organisations act in their markets in response to threats or opportunities. Usually, the imaginative ways may not be based on any single individual's ideas within the organisation but instead, from ongoing social constructions from which novel ways of behaving naturally emerge.

A second study that offers an alternative way of studying and thereby improving current knowledge of organisational creativity is by Martin (2009). Martin critiqued mainstream approaches to studying organisational creativity, for being a 'hegemonic framework' that prioritises studying and supporting only persons who develop outcomes that are novel and useful. Through their definitions of creativity as the ability to come up with new and useful ideas (Rigolizzo & Amabile, 2015), Martin argues that mainstream creativity studies fail to consider other forms of engagement in creative acts which are not manifest or do not lead to such new and useful outcomes. This may be due to reasons such as issues of power within organisations that overlook certain peoples' efforts in coming up with new and useful ideas. 'Bootleggers', employees who clandestinely work on experimenting with their ideas without managerial approval, may also fall into this category as their efforts are not formally recognised and may even be punished if found out (Mainemelis, 2010; Criscuolo et al., 2014). Yet, the actions of bootleggers and 'creative deviants'



account for the bulk of radical inventions. For example, Charles House of Hewlett-Packard defied managerial orders and without support proceeded to develop the now popular large screen displays (Hill, 2012).

According to the humanistic perspective from which Martin (2009) argues, every human is capable of some creative ability even if they do not act in ways that readily proves it. Thus, research and management efforts should be directed at examining why certain employees or people do not manifest creative behaviour rather than concentrating efforts on the behaviours of a select few who receive the support of management. I consider that in addition to his primary aim of giving a 'voice' to people whose efforts at coming up with new and useful ideas are not counted for various reasons, Martin's (2009) work also draws important attention to the need to study activities and actions that take place as part of processes for developing imaginative responses to problems, as this approach to problem solving forms an essential part of learning about creativity. These actions may include experimenting with ideas and making reasonable mistakes, all of which are relevant to broader aims of coming up with new and useful ideas.

Third, some researchers have departed from the predominant stream of literature by emphasising social interactions that occur during creative processes. In their model of collective creativity, Hargadon and Bechky (2006) described specific moments or creative moments as they called them, which are suited to the collective development of imaginative responses by organisations. Such moments are characterised by a collective, in the case of their study, a group, drawing from and reframing past experiences of some group members, to create new and relevant

responses to organisational problems that may not come easily to an individual working on their own. According to the authors, creative moments happen when individuals with new problems interact with others with existing solutions or experiences. Four main activities happen during the interactions that lead to collective creativity; help-seeking, help-giving, reflective reframing, and reinforcing. While Hargadon and Bechky (2006) only focus on how group members exploit existing ideas, the authors' identification of the four types of social interactions seems to reflect activities that take place during creative processes at various collective levels, such as between organisations. For instance, among contemporary businesses where organisations are using more inclusive means of building new products (Xiaobao et al., 2013), actors within organisational networks, made up of the organisation, their product users and suppliers may engage in the social interactions the authors suggested. Organisations may, for instance, engage in help-seeking when they present problems to their product users and seek for their ideas on possible solutions.

In their work, Drazin et al. (1999) echoed some of the arguments raised above, specifically; that organisational creativity goes beyond individual-level processes and that engagement in creative activities may not always lead to new and useful outcomes. They critique popular creativity literature mainly for assuming that organisational creativity is a mere accumulation of individual and group creativity. Group creativity processes require a constant iteration between different levels of cognition by individuals in the group and the group itself. In the same way, creativity at the organisational level is not simply an aggregate of creativity at the individual or group levels. Instead, organisational creativity may emerge from an

intersection of competing interests and behaviours from the individual, group or organisational level (Drazin et al., 1999). As a result, they argue for the need to distinguish between different levels of analysis made up of the individual, group, and organisational levels respectively. This will allow complexities embedded in what creativity means at each level, as well as cross-level effects among different levels of analysis, such as individuals and groups, to be treated as a balanced and meaningful phenomenon.

Against this background, Drazin et al. (1999) develop a theory of creativity from a sense-making approach. A sense-making approach to understanding creativity privileges a study of how individuals and organisations perceive and make meaning of creative actions. They propose three levels of analysis for engaging in creative acts; the intra-subjective (actor), intersubjective (actor in interaction with two or more individuals, that represents shared frames of reference (which may transcend formal groups or subunits) and collective levels (unfolding of change across intersubjective levels) of analysis. A number of interdependencies exist between these three levels which allow individuals, groups, and organisations to interact and create meanings that determine their level of engagement in the creative process. Drazin et al. (1999) consider that organisations can create and that their creativity goes beyond an aggregate of any of the other levels of analysis (Watson, 2007).

Another important dimension of Drazin et al.'s work is their definition of creativity in terms of engaging in creative activities itself (Gilson & Shalley, 2004). Specifically, they define creativity as 'the process of engagement in creative acts,

regardless of whether the resultant outcomes are novel, useful, or creative' (Drazin et al., 1999: 287). Creative engagement is a process where one behaviourally, cognitively and emotionally attempts to produce novel and original outcomes. Some of the acts involved in this process include identifying new problems and experimenting with ideas (Gilson & Shalley, 2004). The authors illustrate engagement in creative acts using an example of a group of engineers who attempt to develop a creative apparatus. To do this, the engineers examine alternative ideas, exploit previous solutions and even come up with ideas that are considered inventive. At the end of the day, their efforts do not lead to any new or relevant apparatus. Yet, the process involved in coming up with the creative apparatus is 'creative' because it draws on behaviours, cognitions, and emotions that characterize efforts of producing possible creative outcomes. By referring to engagement, Drazin et al. (1999) draw attention to what is done in attempts to be creative rather than in securing outcomes from the process. This view is similarly reflected in Martin's (2009) argument for attention to be placed on interactional activities that take place during the processes that underlie attempts to generate new and useful outcomes.

The final work relevant to the discussion in this section is by Banks et al. (2002) who argue that there is no universal meaning attached to creativity of organisations, and hence no singular way it can be managed. According to the authors, mainstream literature has failed to recognise competing agendas within organisations and the intricate links that exist between organisations and external environments when it comes to how organisations define and manage creativity. Thus, in their study, they researched five media firms and highlighted the various

meanings each of the firms attached to creativity, differences in how they valued it and resulting ways they managed its processes. While some of the businesses they studied prioritised creative processes among employees, for others, creative processes were intricately linked to actors outside their own firm boundaries. Thus, in contrast to mainstream literature which largely concentrates on the internal work environment as the place where creativity or ‘creative action’ resides, they also found that often creativity was defined differently by organisations, and located outside the firm. The main argument from their study was thus to acknowledge and approach creativity of organisations as a socially-embedded process that lends itself to multiple ways of occurring. I summarise the main research ideas I have discussed throughout the literature till now in Table 2.3.

**Table 2.3: Summary of Main Literature Discussed in Chapter 2**

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Key Concepts</b>	<b>Relevant Insights for Conceptual Perspective</b>
Amabile (1988, 1996, 2016)	Creativity as a confluence of personal and contextual factors	Identifies creativity as a social phenomenon
Drazin et al. (1999)	Model of collective creativity	Draws attention to the dynamism of the creative process. Insight that engagement in creative acts is in itself creative. Distinguishes individual, group and organisational creativity.
Hargadon and Bechky (2006)	Moments of creative action	Suggests creative moments as periods that a ‘collective’ engages in creativity. Social interactions that occur during creative moments include help giving, help-seeking and reinforcement.
Nisula (2013)	Creativity by the organisation as organisation’s engagement in knowledgeable actions in novel ways.	Suggests how organisations can operate as creative entities by engaging in novel ways of setting themselves apart. Distinguishes creativity in

		organisations from creativity by organisations.
Banks et al. (2002)	Definition and management of creativity.	Draws attention to the contested nature of organisational creativity and the need to approach its study as a context-specific phenomenon.

### 2.7.1 Synthesis of Alternative Approaches to Studying Organisational Creativity

To summarise the seemingly disparate trajectories taken by scholars who have sought to provide alternative ways of understanding organisational creativity, I highlight three common themes. First, there is a consensus that variance-based approaches to studying organisational creativity has been somewhat unhelpful in opening opportunities for alternative theorising of creativity (Banks et al., 2003; Drazin et al., 1999; Martin, 2009).

Second, they suggest that organisational creativity should not be treated merely as how organisational environments support the creative behaviour of employees. This is a particularly important point to note for my research among small businesses where current studies' support for explaining creativity comes principally from how the work environment (described as adaptable and dynamic) shapes and supports the creative behaviour and activities of employees (Valaei et al., 2016). Taking Nisula's (2013) view of organisational creativity further, I consider that there is vast potential for our understanding of creativity by exploring how small businesses, in themselves, use novel ways to organise activities that set them apart from competitors in similar markets.

Thirdly, these studies advance notions of creativity as a social and dynamic phenomenon by emphasizing different ways in which creativity is constructed and emerges through complex interactions. This is in clear contrast to the static ontological lenses predominant approaches use to describe the work environment as consisting of certain variables which must be manipulated for individual creativity, the dependent outcome to be achieved (Blomberg, 2016). In addition, rather than sequential and fixed stages that psychology researchers assume to take place in the minds of employees, the creative process is projected by these marginal researchers as a social and fluid phenomenon that occurs in day to day actions and interactions within organisations but also outside organisational boundaries (Banks et al., 2002; Fortwengel et al., 2017). This leads me to the final common theme from this part of the literature discussion relevant for my research. All the discussions above point to the need to concentrate on engagement in creative acts as a viable alternative to explaining organisational creativity. In essence, to task ourselves with answering the question, how do organisations come to develop imaginative solutions?

## 2.8 Chapter Summary

My discussion in this chapter was aimed at developing an overview of current scholarly thinking of organisational creativity. This was to evaluate their relevance to my aim of understanding the nature and processes of creativity among small businesses. In the first section of the chapter, I presented a discussion of predominant approaches to explaining creativity in the context of organisations pointing to the fact that variance-based approaches, premised on functionalist and managerial orientations are the most popular. I noted how researchers', based on

these approaches, usually study creativity by examining how conditions in the work environment interact with intrinsic characteristics of individuals or groups to affect their creative outcomes. Based on a discussion of Amabile's Componential Model (Amabile, 2012; Amabile, 1988; Amabile & Pratt, 2016), I drew attention to various factors within the work environment and the individual (or group) that are usually considered to be useful for explaining organisational creativity.

I argued that despite their relevance to current research, variance-based approaches have marginalised other ways in which organisations may engage in activities that can potentially lead to the development of new and useful ideas. I then moved to the second section of the literature where I described attempts by a few authors to offer alternative ways of studying creativity in organisations. Here, I noted common calls for researchers to focus on processes that can potentially lead to building new and useful outcomes as a means to understand creativity both as a social and processual phenomenon.

An important point I made in my discussion of mainstream literature relates to how empirical contexts from which the popular models of creativity have drawn their data have often been behavioural laboratories, schools, or R&D departments of large organisations. Although these contexts have been relevant in helping to build most of the knowledge we currently have of creativity in many fields including organisations, I consider that the findings are not fully sufficient to generate a relevant and situated understanding of how creative processes in organisations with distinct characteristics, as in the case of small businesses, unfold.



In the next chapter, I examine small businesses more closely, paying attention to how their unique organisation may influence the ways in which their processes towards building original and relevant products are carried out. I then consider conceptual perspectives that seem to resonate with their characteristics in order to more deeply explore the processes underlying their generation of new and useful ideas.

### **3 TOWARDS NEW CONCEPTUAL LENSES FOR SMALL BUSINESSES'**

#### **CREATIVITY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter follows on from the previous chapter, where I reviewed mainstream literature on organisational creativity and highlighted how principal lines of discussion have been shaped by managerial and functionalist orientations. One of the points I raised in my discussion was that the assumptions underlying these perspectives do not sufficiently account for creativity in the context of small businesses. For instance, small businesses may be resource-constrained and unable to provide work environments that support employee creativity in the ways popular studies suggest.

This present chapter reviews literature on what makes small businesses distinct, and discusses what an understanding of creativity in such businesses may add to our present knowledge of organisational creativity. Importantly, the chapter suggests interpretive lenses that are sensitive to the characteristics of small businesses and can potentially offer ways to develop a relevant understanding of their creative processes.

To tackle these objectives, I first give an overview of small businesses, noting their centrality to most national economies and the importance of their engagement in creative activities to the growth of industries in their respective economies. Based on this awareness of the relationship between small businesses and creativity, I note how surprising it is that very little research has been done linking the two. I identify

possible reasons for this, and bring special attention to the few studies that, to the best of my knowledge, have been done on creativity in the context of small businesses. Next, I closely examine characteristics of small businesses and how paradoxes introduced by these characteristics present a contradictory environment for engagement in creative activities. I suggest that these characteristics can offer valuable insights for understanding creativity in how they shape and define processes small businesses use to develop new ideas. Importantly, paying attention to their resource-constraints, I suggest that insights from studies in entrepreneurship may be possibly enlightening in my attempt to examine the nature and processes of creativity among such businesses. This is because research in this field sheds light on possibilities of creating new value in spite of, or because of, few resources organisations control. In this regard, they also highlight how engaging with networks (to access resources entrepreneurs often lack), are intrinsic to successful entrepreneurial processes (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Mainela & Puhakka, 2011).

### 3.2 An Overview of Small Businesses

The European Commission defines Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) as independent organisations with two main threshold criteria, an employee size of less than 250 and an annual turnover of not more than £25.9 million (European Commission, 2003). Defining this group of firms became particularly important when the EU realised that despite their unique resource constraints, there were no specialised legislations and benefits targeted specially at SMEs (Federation of Small Businesses, UK, 2016). By defining firms as micro (i.e. less than 10 employees), small (i.e. less than 50 employees), or medium (i.e. less than 250 employees), the

EU and member states gained more clarity on which firms to target for support programmes and legislation (Federation of Small Businesses, UK, 2016). Despite popular use of the term SMEs, government institutions and academics sometimes refer to these firms as small firms or small businesses (Federation of Small Businesses, UK, 2016, Hotho & Champion, 2011). Henceforth and in the rest of my research, I use the latter because the collective term 'small' connotes a compact characteristic that is qualitatively different from larger businesses and aligns well with discussions I raise in support of their unique ways of organising creative processes.

Small businesses make up a substantial percentage of economic activities in most countries (Dhillon et al., 2009, Eurostat, 2017, Valaei et al., 2016). I situate my study within the UK context partly because the country has one of the highest numbers of small businesses in Europe (coming only after Italy, France, Spain and Germany in the EU). The high numbers make the cumulative relevance of small businesses to the UK economy crucial (Eurostat, 2017). Thus, I expect my research on creativity, which has been identified as key to small businesses' performance and in some cases, survival (Moghimi & Subramaniam, 2013), to be a significant addition to current knowledge on management and policy practices aimed at supporting such organisations to contribute to the national economy.

At 99.3%, small businesses have the largest percentage of companies within the UK private business sector (Department for Business Innovation and Skills UK, 2016). At the start of 2016, their combined turnover in the UK was £1.8 trillion representing 47% of the turnover of all private businesses (Department for Business

Innovation and Skills, 2016). Small businesses provide employment opportunities to skilled persons (Dhillon et al., 2009), employing 16.1 million people in the UK at in 2017 (Federation of Small Businesses, 2017). They are more able to meet the needs of local niches that are usually unserved by larger firms (Aranda et al., 2007), and complement the activities of larger firms by carrying out outsourced activities. This makes them instrumental players in the value chain of most products (Morya & Dwivedi, 2009).

Partly as a result of the reasons stated above, policymakers and researchers place a lot of confidence in small businesses to contribute significantly to economic growth (Federation of Small Businesses, UK, 2016; Valaei et al., 2016). This confidence has motivated research on ways they can successfully improve their competitive advantage (Gagliardi et al., 2013) and even 'level the playing field' with their larger counterparts (GOV.UK, 2018).

Within these studies, engaging in innovation activities has been widely recognised as one way small businesses can positively distinguish themselves (Cakar & Ertürk, 2010; Mazzei et al., 2016). This is partly because compared to larger business; small businesses are assumed to have internal agility and dynamism that allows them to respond quickly to frequent discontinuities that characterise current, unpredictable economic environments (Valaei et al., 2016). In response, management researchers have been keen to extend understanding of how small businesses innovate and ways to encourage their innovation practices (Çakar & Ertürk, 2010; Berends et al. 2014). In their study of the computer games industry for instance, Hotho and Champion (2011) studied how interactions between

employees, management and industry-specific factors influence the ways small businesses within the computer games industry enact the innovation process. Barrett, Sexton and Lee (2008), studied factors that affect innovation in seven small construction firms and encouraged firms to pay attention to their business strategy, business processes and human resources due to the high relevance of these to innovation.

In contrast to research done concerning innovation among small businesses, there is little academic research on how these businesses enact their creative process. This is surprising given that creativity is one of the most essential first steps to innovation (Sarooghi et al., 2015), and one would expect researchers to be keen on improving knowledge of how this front-end stage of the innovation process occurs among small businesses. Before I discuss possible reasons for the relative paucity of research on creativity among small businesses, I briefly examine the relationship between small businesses and creativity to draw attention to why research on the topic is useful.

### 3.3 Relationship between Small Businesses and Creativity

Creativity has been linked with small businesses for two reasons. First, most small businesses seem to thrive on the development of new and useful ideas. In fact, many small business owners and managers consider developing such ideas as crucial to their businesses even if they cannot always afford to put in place measures to support it (Banks et al., 2003; Zhou & Hoever, 2014). Çakar and Ertürk (2010) suggest that the sustained growth and competitive advantage of small businesses largely depend on their ability to build on their advantage of searching for quick and

new solutions to problems in their markets. In addition, being able to develop original solutions and responses has been noted as important for small business growth. Literature is confident that applying creative ideas to work processes and management practices enhances small businesses' ability to consistently perform in tune with new trends in their markets (Mann & Chan, 2011).

Second, there are strong indications that small businesses are advantaged to engage in processes that may result in new and useful ideas (Dhillon et al., 2009), and therefore usually spearhead creative activities in industries across many economies (Valaei et al., 2016). Valaei et al. (2016) argue that small businesses have behavioural advantages (such as faster internal communication and less bureaucracies) that may be helpful in engendering a conducive atmosphere to support employees' engagement in creative actions, while large businesses, due to their resource advantages (such as sufficient financial resources to spend on R&D activities) may be more successful at implementing the ideas. Essentially, small businesses are argued on the basis of their 'soft' qualities (Wiklund et al., 2003) to be invaluable to the development of new and useful ideas essential to meet growing market needs. While there are parallel indications that small businesses may have certain internal constraints that attenuate these 'soft qualities' (Yew Wong & Aspinwall, 2004), they have generally been designated as special 'agents' of creativity based on assumptions that they will likely draw on dynamic behaviours to support the processes necessary for crafting original products and services.

Despite the points raised above to suggest the centrality of creativity to small businesses, empirical research dedicated to explaining how specifically small

businesses come to develop novel and relevant products or solutions remains few. There may be at least three reasons for this, which I discuss in the next section.

### 3.4 Reasons for Relative Paucity of Organisational Creativity Research in Small Businesses

The first possible reason for the relative dearth of research on small businesses' creativity is a result of not fully clarifying the two concepts of innovation and creativity (Anderson et al., 2014). As noted, research on innovation in small businesses is plentiful while research on creativity among small businesses is relatively lacking. Creativity is one of the essential first steps towards innovation. In fact, no innovation is 'possible without the creative process that marks the front end of the process' (Amabile et al., 2004: 1). This means that creativity involves processes underlying the possible development of new and useful ideas to solve a problem while innovation entails actual implementation of those ideas (Çokpekin & Knudsen, 2012). The two processes are however conducted iteratively to the extent that they often require partly overlapping skills and resources. A positive implication of this is that small business' creativity researchers can learn from innovation research which has received relatively more attention by focusing on areas of convergence. On the other hand, a troubling result of the overlapping processes underlying creativity and innovation is that the two terms are not always distinguished by researchers. Hence, innovation, usually treated as subsuming creativity (Georgsdottir & Getz, 2004) is placed into the research spotlight at the expense of research on creative processes partly due to innovation's relative appeal in directly supporting change agenda of organisations. Baer (2012: 1102) for



instance suggests that 'innovation can be conceptualised as encompassing two different activities: the development of novel, useful ideas and their implementation'.

Yet, creativity and innovation to a large extent exhibit markedly different attributes, draw on different resources and require different organisational conditions to achieve success (Sarooghi et al., 2015). For example, established organisational routines may be unhelpful to creative processes as they may induce a state of organisational inertia against conceptualising new ideas and yet, be essential to offer a stable work environment needed to implement new ideas once they are generated, i.e. innovation (Becker & Zirpoli, 2009). Thus, an organisation will usually put in place exploration and experimentation opportunities for employees to bring up new ideas when creativity is needed but increase exploitation opportunities for idea synergy and implementation (Çokpekin & Knudsen, 2012). One unfortunate implication of not distinguishing creativity—the processes of searching out new ideas—from innovation, the successful implementation of those ideas, is that it undermines the value of experimenting or 'trying out' ideas which may in the long run fail but form an essential part of creative processes (Blomberg, 2014).

Second, organisational researchers may be dissuaded by difficulties in collecting data on small business' creativity. Small businesses use less structured approaches to creativity which are difficult to examine (Parida et al., 2012). The creative process is known to be obscure and complex in all manner of firms (Amabile and Mueller, 2008), however, such obscurity and complexity seem to be compounded when attempts are made to study the process within small businesses. This is because such firms are relatively more spontaneous in behaviour (Yew Wong

and Aspinwall 2004) and unlike their larger counterparts, scarcely have institutionalised creative activities taking place within specialised R&D units (Kirner et al., 2009). Researchers have probably found the relatively clearer and observable processes in larger business to be more attractive research contexts.

A third explanation, popularly cited by small business scholars to explain why such businesses have generally not received satisfactory research attention in many organisational behaviour topics, is the perception that management practices appropriate to large businesses are equally applicable to small businesses (Berends et al., 2014). Here, a number of studies (e.g. Mazzei et al., 2016) have emphasised significant ways small businesses may differ from larger organisations in the ways they organise their creative processes. According to Mazzei et al., small businesses have fewer employees, are less inclined to establish many departments and are thus unlikely to evolve into bureaucratic organisations (Berends et al. 2014). Other researchers have drawn attention to how their resource constraints (such as limited financial and human resources) small business face or the kind of business they engage in may motivate certain patterns of behaviour relating to the development of new and useful ideas different from larger business (Yew Wong & Aspinwall, 2004). For instance, Banks et al. (2002) demonstrated in their study how for small media businesses engaged in marketing, managers considered customers to be central to their creative processes as their requests for complex products and services led to the need of improving creative capabilities of the small media firms. Relatedly, as noted in the previous chapter, although creativity always emerges from a context, creativity research has to a large extent been silent on context. Where research has been explicit on context to develop theories, empirical evidence has been done in

contexts that are not directly relevant to small businesses (Chapter 2). The result is approaches that provide prescriptive lists of ways to encourage organisational creativity in ways that appear to transcend particularities of contexts being studied (Chilcott & Barry, 2016).

For these reasons, research on small business' creativity is scarce in existing literature. My motivation for focusing on small businesses in this study is partly premised on the desire to explore further the view of an enduring reciprocal relationship between these organisations and creativity—as identified in the discussion above—as well as on the complex factors that shape this relationship. In addition, my research of these firms is based on an understanding that their potential to contribute to economic development can be enhanced by engaging in creative activity in useful ways (Dhillon et al., 2009). Here, my empirical study of ways they approach the possible development of new and useful ideas appears useful to provide insights for more relevant theorising in creativity studies. Such a study will also help provide managers with empirically generated knowledge necessary to make decisions that favour the creative development of solutions to address organisational problems. Furthermore, findings of my research may be useful to companies who may not fall under the rubric of small businesses but are keen to learn from creative processes they (small businesses) employ to distinguish themselves. After all, some large firms have already found it relevant to adopt pockets of small firm work designs, such as setting up small teams and reducing barriers through flatter work structures (Cusumano, 1997). Some have gone as far as adopting an entire 'entrepreneurship culture', organising their large businesses as 'pseudo-independent' small businesses (Bilton, 2010).

To the best of my knowledge, only five empirical research studies, till date have been conducted with the explicit aim of deepening understanding of creativity among small businesses. These five exclude research done, which treat creativity as one out of many phenomena to be studied, studies done on creativity and innovation, research conducted in other languages aside from English and unpublished research. In the section that follows, I discuss these studies to highlight common research areas they have explored as well as questions left open that may form the basis for further research.

### 3.5 Research Undertaken on Small Businesses and Creativity

I start with Maas & de Coning's (1999) study, which is probably one of the earliest studies on the topic of creativity of small businesses. Following mainstream approaches to studying organisational creativity, Maas & de Coning's research focused on identifying factors that can promote employee's engagement in creative actions within small businesses. To this purpose, the authors used questionnaires to collect data from 342 respondents made up of both employees and owner/manager(s) from different firms in South Africa. Based on the data collected, they identified seven indicators of owner-managers' alignment with creativity and four indicators from the organisation that shows its receptiveness to manifestations of creativity or evidence of engagement in creative actions. Indicators of owner managers included locus of control, value system and motivation, financial management, training, experience and a holistic approach to management, while the four indicators of the organisation included analyses, idea generating sessions, creative systems, and structure of the enterprises. The authors found that employee

manifestations of creativity were reduced when business owners' support for creativity (assessed by the seven indicators) were low. This means that even when organisational structures and processes that could enhance creativity were in place in the businesses they studied, employees still struggled to engage in creative actions because business owners did not seem to personally support such actions. Essentially, unsatisfactory owner characteristics undermined organisational indicators needed for employee creativity and compromised the total creative output of the firms (Maas & de Coning, 1999). Although Maas & Coning's study was carried out in the specific context of South Africa, their findings may be typical of most small businesses as owner-managers in general, usually exercise significant control over the activities of the business (Yew Wong & Aspinwall, 2004), and inadvertently (or perhaps, deliberately) shape the kind of activities employees engage in. The (usually) significant role of owner managers in shaping whether and how employees engage in creative actions by small businesses, I find, has not been given much attention in the mainstream creativity literature.

Moghimi and Subramaniam (2013) similarly paid attention to factors necessary for facilitating employee creativity in small businesses. They focused exclusively on the organisational climate and its effect on employee creativity in sixty-one Malaysian firms. Similarly, employing a quantitative approach to data collection and analysis, they found a positive relationship between employee's creative behaviour and the organisational climate they work in. More precisely, their study revealed that three factors; employees' perceptions of availability of resources for creativity; the extent to which employees are aware of goals and creative

expectations by their employers; and leadership support, were the three most crucial dimensions of organisational climate that affect employee's creativity.

In their study, Banks et al. (2002) used interviews to explore how creativity is defined and managed by new media small businesses (made up of the following sub-sectors: advertising and marketing, education and e-learning, graphic design, digital art and IT/business systems software). Their work, broadly motivated by understanding creativity in creative industries first highlighted the relevance of creativity to small businesses, which seek to meet the dynamic needs of their markets. Importantly, they found significant differences in how creativity was defined by each sub-sector of small media firm they interviewed. For example, those in advertising and marketing defined creativity as a set of managerial skills and responsibilities, which influence commercial success while those in Education and IT defined it in terms of novelty in content and content design. This formed the basis of their recommendation to creativity researchers to pay attention to the unique work context creativity is being defined and managed for findings that are relevant to stakeholders aiming to support creativity in specific businesses. Banks et al. also found variations in how creative processes were performed and managed in the firms they studied. For instance, while managers of advertising media firms felt customers were indispensable to their creative processes, managers within more digital arts-based activities approached creativity as something that emerged internally, specifically from their designers. A more general conclusion from their study is the need to shift from focusing only on factors essential to individuals or group creativity, which has been idealised as determining creative success, towards

organisational processes and relationships of organisations with their external world that influence the development of imaginative products and services.

Shin et al. (2013) also developed similar conclusions to that of Banks et al. (2002), encouraging researchers to move towards research that provides an understanding of creativity at the firm level. They demonstrated how their concentration on owner-managers' role in the creative process could help to achieve this shift. Using the upper echelon theory and contingency perspective, the authors studied how CEO's characteristics, particularly learning and development orientation, would influence creativity at the organisational level and further how such a relationship may be impacted by organisational learning systems. The authors confirmed, as is perhaps typical for most small businesses, that in the firms they studied, CEOs' development orientation, defined as the CEOs willingness to place priority on employee development behaviours, had a positive impact on organisational creativity. This is particularly true for a weakly established organisational system whereas when an organisation has a strong or well-built system, the effect the CEO has on organisational behaviour including creativity is attenuated.

The final study I found in my review of literature had a somewhat different focus from those already examined above. In their study, Cokpekin and Knudsen (2012) examined the espoused relationship between creativity and innovation output within small businesses. The population of their study was small businesses located in an unnamed region of Denmark out of which 147 firms responded. Aside from a few modifications, the authors largely relied on Amabile's Keys Model and CCQ

constructs in designing their survey. Based on their analysis, Cokpekin & Knudsen (2012) concluded that constructs developed from generic work environments to be essential for creativity may not always support different types of innovation in small businesses. According to Cokpekin and Knudsen, different types of innovation – process or product necessitate different structures of creativity. For instance, process innovation seeks ways to reduce variation in tasks to lower cost in the process whereas market-driven innovation attempts to increase variation in ideas and behaviours aimed at delivering novel products to the market. For these reasons, organising the work environment of small businesses for creativity may be detrimental to process innovation in the small firm environment. The conclusion of the study was that the generic work environment characteristics that have been raised to explain creativity in previous studies, and which have predominantly come from studies in large, R & D firms should not be conceived as equally applicable to all work contexts.

While work done specifically to help explain small business creativity is sparse, the studies discussed above provide some strong indications for research to probe further into how creativity is experienced by the small business sector. One precise admonition that runs through the studies above is the need for researchers to acknowledge how the unique contexts of small businesses may influence the practice and management of their creative processes. These studies demonstrate how even within small businesses, there are significant differences in factors that influence the development of new and useful ideas as well as how creativity is 'performed'. While the first two studies (Maas & de Coning, 1999; Moghimi & Subramaniam, 2013), by their focus on links between the work environment and



employee creativity seemed to follow closely research trends by mainstream organisational creativity literature (discussed in chapter two), they still draw attention to the contested nature of creativity in the businesses they studied. I suggest that a situated approach to studying the processes of organisational creativity by small businesses is essential to extending current literature as well as helping stakeholders focus on attributes that are most important to the context in which they seek to manage creativity.

An important point Banks et al. (2002) and Shin et al.'s (2013) make is the need to seek an understanding of creativity at the level of the organisation. Banks et al. suggest the need to pay attention to creative processes at the level of the small business, rather than a fixation on individual-level processes. As discussed in Chapter two, the attention of prevailing literature in organisational creativity has been skewed towards the individual or team level of analysis without much attention to creative processes at the level of the organisation. I believe this shift is especially crucial for small businesses as their dynamism and their relative sensitivity to external factors reduces the prominent role usually ascribed to any individual employee or team for engaging in activities leading to creative outcomes.

The next factor worth highlighting relates to matters of methodology and methods. Of the five studies discussed, only one (Banks et al., 2002) used a qualitative and inductive approach to explore the subject of creativity of small businesses. The rest, typical of general methodological approaches to studying creativity in the context of organisations (Chilcott & Barry, 2016), used quantitative methods. As some creativity researchers have argued, such quantitative methods,

usually driven by positivist viewpoints, do not fully explore and unearth the complexities of the phenomenon of organisational creativity and the social constructions associated with it (Stuhlfaut, 2011; Bailey et al., 2009). In a sense, they may offer findings that do not account for competing dimensions that underlie organisational creativity especially in the context of small businesses. On this basis, qualitative and interpretative methods and methodologies, which focus on inductively developing a situated and in-depth understanding of organisational creativity (Stuhlfaut, 2011), seem more appropriate for research into the nature and processes of creativity in small businesses. In relation to this, with the exception of Banks et al.'s study, the four other studies approached their research by treating creativity as a dependent variable, affected by certain factors within the organisation. While this is useful, it offers very little understanding of the actual processes and the social interactions that underlie organisational attempts to develop new and useful ideas.

A line of discussion that seems lacking in the literature reviewed here is how small businesses' ability to craft imaginative solutions and responses may be influenced or shaped by the constraints they operate with. Constraints from insufficient financial and human resources for instance, have been noted as a common feature of many small businesses and are significant in shaping decisions on which goals to prioritise for competitive advantage (Valaei et al., 2016). Given that the resources needed to build creative products and services, such as time and money, are equally needed for other aspects of running the small business efficiently (Mazzei et al., 2016), it would appear that the ways such businesses are able to

build inventive products in light of these constraints must be incorporated into research discussions for a deeper and situated understanding.

Until this point in the chapter, I have given an overview of how small businesses and creativity are linked. First, researchers have extolled small businesses as organisations who can, relative to their larger counterparts, excel in developing creative products. Second, public policy makers and researchers consider that small businesses may be able to increase their competitiveness and contribute to economic growth if they engage in acts that lead to building new and useful products. Given these two indications which seem to suggest the relevance of research examining creativity by these businesses, I have also reviewed research done specifically to improve knowledge in this regard. While very little work has been done, I identified relevant lines of research that, when pursued, may offer a deeper understanding of creativity among these businesses.

In the next section, I move a step further towards my aim in this chapter of developing a conceptual perspective that can be used to explore how small businesses engage in creative actions. To do this, I highlight how certain distinct characteristics of small businesses may influence the ways they organise themselves to support the development of novel and impactful software solutions. Based on these characteristics and lines of enquiry left open by research on creativity among small businesses as well as ‘marginal’ creativity literature, I proceed in the final section to propose a conceptual perspective that may potentially offer a deeper understanding of their creative processes.

### 3.6 Characterising Creativity of Small Businesses

My research's emphasis on creativity among small businesses stems from anecdotal evidence that such firms have distinct characteristics, which significantly shapes their decisions and behaviour relating to developing original solutions to problems. My intention in this section is to highlight some of these characteristics to show the difficulty in placing such businesses within mainstream discourses of creativity, which have emerged from contexts (such as large firms, behavioural laboratories, and school children) that do not sufficiently address their peculiarities. In the discussion, I draw on key characteristics Yew Wong & Aspinwall (2004) used to distinguish small businesses from larger businesses' knowledge management.

It is worth noting here that though I refer to small businesses, I do not imply a homogenous set of organisations. Small businesses vary on several attributes including the kind of industry they operate in, regional and national location, length of years in business and size, which is the most commonly used differentiator (Desouza & Awazu, 2006). Thus, in the review that follows, where I consider differences in size to significantly shape possible ways small businesses organise their creative processes, I draw attention to them. Yet, my aim in this section, and broadly in my research is not to analyse differences between firms classed under small businesses (SMEs). This is because to suggest that any business is typical of its cohort just based on similarities in size or other factors, would be too simplistic a categorisation.

### 3.6.1 Ownership, Structure and Management

I have categorised ownership, management and structure under the same set of characteristics because their implications for small businesses' creativity are largely linked. In small businesses, the owner usually serves as the manager. In some cases, as for instance when the owner is not an expert in the field of the business, there may be a more experienced chief operations executive. Matlay (2002), studied 6000 small businesses and found that, within 'larger' small businesses, it is common for owners to recruit professionals to run the business. In most cases, running of small businesses is done by either one or two people who formed part of originating the idea or key product upon which the firm is built (McAdam & Keogh, 2004).

In terms of size, small businesses usually operate with less than 250 employees. This may lead to lesser departmental interfaces and less priority placed on functional mindsets compared to larger organisations (Ghobadian & Galleary, 1997). Another likely implication of their small sizes is an ability to work as teams and run a unified culture (Ghobadian & Galleary, 1997). Finally, due to their small size and few departments, small businesses may have less standardized and formalised layers of management and are thus unlikely to evolve into bureaucratic organisations (Berends et al., 2014). Bureaucratic organisations seek efficiency and coordination through formalising behaviours (Ghobadian & Galleary, 1997). It is important to note that, as small businesses grow in employee numbers, some of these features may be difficult to sustain. For instance, some businesses may need to introduce multiple hierarchies as employees grow in numbers, leading to gradual bureaucratic

tendencies (Anderson & Ullah, 2014; Hirst et al., 2011). In some cases, small businesses with very few employees can be extremely bureaucratic with centralised decision-making carried out by the owner. As a result, the implications I discuss may not necessarily apply to all small businesses.

These characteristics hold a number of positive implications for creativity. First, less workplace bureaucracy and fewer hierarchies in small businesses may mean that they are more able to respond quickly to changing needs of new and existing markets (Ng & Keasey, 2010). Thus, when there is a need in their markets, the requirements small businesses employ to address them could be naturally reduced due to the absence of 'time-consuming layers of evaluation' (Amabile, 1998). Second, the structure of flat vertical hierarchies in small businesses may result in decentralised management and high levels of autonomy by employees at all levels, a crucial antecedent that motivates employees to engage in creative activities (Rigolizzo & Amabile, 2015). Durst & Runar Edvardsson (2012) suggest that flat hierarchies and a free-flow management structure are important factors for creativity to flourish. This reduced bureaucracy, if present, may provide small businesses with flexibility and speed, devoid of strict and formal communication patterns, which support innovation efforts (Berends et al., 2014). This characteristic of small businesses has featured prominently in the literature as supporting behaviours aligned with creative decision making (Valaei et al., 2016).

Yet, the fact that there are only one or two owner-managers, coupled with the usually flat hierarchies' in small businesses, means that managing directors or owner-managers are highly visible (Durst & Runar Edvardsson, 2012) and more

inclined to exercise direct oversight control on most aspects of the business. Ng & Roberts (2007) remind us that when owners are also managers & when 'outsiders', such as non-executive directors, are also co-opted into 'helping' the strategic development of the small business, then the collective interests of stakeholders can be effectively channelled in the firm's strategic, long-term development. If this is so, then it is possible that owner-managers and managers also develop plans, techniques and sometimes specific actions they perceive as necessary in reaching these goals. They significantly influence how resources are used and the overall strategic direction of the organisation (O'Regan et al., 2006). For this reason, owners or owner-managers will desire to supervise closely the actions of employees to gear them towards these ends, inadvertently discouraging efforts towards building imaginative products by other members of their organisations.

For instance, the Managing Director of a small marketing firm may be directly involved in accounts, human resources, design, and sales. Employees working with such a person then typically responds to his leadership by approaching him repeatedly for ideas on how to go about their tasks. It is worth noting that, even within so-called high psychologically safe work environments where employees feel they can take initiatives and not be punished for their mistakes (Madjar & Ortiz-Walters, 2009, Zhang et al., 2010), it is still common for them to seek regular direction and guidance from management. This is especially so when managers are seen as having superior technical knowledge and strong social networks from which they can source resources (such as ideas, opportunities and business linkages) needed for problem-solving (Zhou et al., 2007). In such cases processes of creating value through new ideas may not be well distributed across organisational members, and

instead becomes the preserve of managers. As Ghobadian & Gallear (1997) concluded, the centralisation of decision-making processes within small businesses often implies that successful (or failed) attempts at change depends on the manager.

Against the foregoing, it appears reasonable to argue that within small businesses, very few people, usually the owner-manager and managing director may unintentionally undermine a holistic approach to internal efforts at building creative solutions by serving as the sole repository of creative ideas. In other words, creativity ideas emerging from small businesses may usually represent those of the owner-manager rather than that of the whole firm (Verhees & Meulenbergh, 2004).

### 3.6.2 Organisational Culture

Organisational culture, a set of collective norms, which influence the behaviour of members in the company, is a major antecedent of the development of creative outcomes in organisations (Andriopoulos, 2001). This is because, behaviours relating to the generation of new and useful ideas, the encouragement and support lent to these ideas and their implementation are all outcomes of the kind of culture that is present in organisations. Small businesses are known to usually have an informal culture as well as frequent interaction between employees (Choueke & Armstrong, 2000).

In addition, there are usually fewer interest groups and a highly-unified culture in small businesses compared to larger firms where the sheer large number of employees results in diverse interest groups springing up (Yew Wong & Aspinwall, 2004). For these reasons, small business employees are argued to more likely



behave in ways that reflect the values, shared goals and corporate mind-sets of the whole organisation rather than their immediate departmental or individual goals. This behaviour is important for creativity by allowing employees to search for ideas and responses in line with the company's overall aim rather than being limited by departmental goals and needs (Kuan & Aspinwall, 2005).

Moreover, small businesses may usually have an organic and adaptable culture with very loose job specifications (Yew Wong & Aspinwall, 2004). In such a culture, teamwork and peer support, two of the most important ways to promote creativity within organisations (Amabile, 1996) are considered to be prevalent. Also, the unified culture is likely to support trust, rather than rivalry relationships among employees (and management). This kind of trust may create an environment that manifests sincerity and openness, and thereby encourage employees to share their ideas with colleagues (Martins & Martins, 2002). Such trust and openness also mean that people feel emotionally safe to pursue creative ideas and behaviours. As mentioned earlier, not all small businesses benefit from such a unified culture based on size. For instance, conflict of interest between shareholders (such as between distantly related members and blood-related family members) is known to be typical of family-controlled small businesses (FCBs) (Seaman et al., 2010).

The 'oneness' of thought and goal in the bulk of small businesses, if too pronounced, through for instance employing only individuals who are likely to behave according to goal expectations without challenging processes could lead to a homogenizing effect and increased path dependence, factors which impede creative thinking. In fact, according to groupthink literature, strong in-group

pressures arising from an irrational need to maintain group coherence and consensus may cause individuals to avoid considering alternative solutions to problems if they are not in consonance with the dominant plans of the group. This can lead to disastrous consequences of ill-assessed group decisions (Ntayi et al., 2010). In addition, the organismic culture if not well managed, can result in a disorganised work culture, which can have negative consequences on the work environment appropriate for building new and useful ideas. Despite indications that a chaotic environment may be useful for creative thinking and behaviour (Perry, 1995), we also know that unchecked chaos without clear routines reduces the ability of individuals to efficiently recognise opportunities for creativity (Becker & Knudsen; Pentland et al., 2011).

### 3.6.3 Human and Financial Resources

As noted above, one of the often-cited factors scholars and practitioners alike ascribe to small businesses is the fact that they operate with relatively lesser financial and human resources than large, well-established organisations (Berends et al., 2014, Scozzi et al., 2005, Tidd et al., 1997). There are three possible implications of this on ways small businesses may engage in activities relevant to building imaginative outcomes.

The first relates to working with few employees. As already mentioned in discussing their culture, researchers suggest that the few number of employees and unified culture most small businesses work with may make developing and evaluating new ideas relatively more easily achievable because common goals underpin employees' efforts and conflict of interest is reduced. Here, researchers

argue that it may be easier to foster feelings of camaraderie among few employees in a way that intrinsically motivates them for creativity (Kittur, 2010). Next, multitasking has been noted as a common feature of the nature of work that results from the few number of employees within small businesses (McAdam & Reid, 2001). In this sense, although employees may be assigned to particular tasks, it is possible for one employee to work on more than one task across departments. For example, a software developer may also be expected to perform the function of a business analyst who charts product specifications with employees. In the long run, employees working across departments may facilitate the transfer of ideas from one task to the other, thereby, diffusing creative ideas within the small business (Hisyam Selamat & Choudrie, 2004).

Low employee numbers, however, pose severe challenges to small businesses' efforts to build imaginative products. This is because employees are usually overtasked with duties that leave them with little physical and mental space to think creatively about problems in their work. In fact, lack of time, which has consistently surfaced as a factor that hinders employee's ability to be creative (Mann & Chan, 2011), seems to be a significant problem among small businesses as they usually work with less than adequate employees. Thus, compared to more resourced, large businesses, small businesses may not be able to afford providing their employees 'slack time' to work on side projects even if these have the potential to lead to imaginative products (Rigolizzo & Amabile, 2015).

Thirdly, operating under tight financial budgets makes it crucial for most small businesses to operate as lean organisations, meeting customer needs with as few

resources as possible (Radas & Božić, 2009). Consequently, such businesses may trade off certain activities completely to be able to save on time and monetary costs. Unfortunately, actions and ideas that are not familiar with the firm's day to day work routines, even though potentially useful, may be considered as barriers to firm efficiency and productivity (Levitt, 2002). Specifically, engagement in exploratory and experimentation activities may not be encouraged. Instead, such activities may be treated as an unaffordable risk rather than a budding advantage for building new products and services (Berends et al., 2014). In such instances, organisational actors operate under the impression of the need to fully exploit available resources rather than undertake exploratory and novel actions which cannot be catered for by their organisations. The lack of financial resources has been suggested as the main factor that impedes small businesses ability to undertake innovative and creative activities.

#### 3.6.4 Customers and Markets

Another characteristic of small businesses that may have direct implications on their ability to come up with new and useful ideas is their proximity to their task environment, made up of competitors, suppliers and customers (Berends et al., 2014). Such proximity to external stakeholders may offer small businesses the opportunity to source for knowledge and new ideas externally (Durst & Runar Edvardsson, 2012). For instance, by being close to their customers, small businesses may be relatively quick to identify their needs or problems and develop new and impactful solutions to meet those needs (Scozzi et al., 2005). On the other hand, their closeness to task environments, coupled with their internal limitations

could make small businesses more sensitive to factors in these environments. By this, I mean that small business' activities, including the kind of problems they seek creative solutions for and the actual activities they undertake in coming up with new and useful ideas, will be often shaped by factors that are outside their control. In addition, their closeness to customers may lead them to develop more customer-driven innovations, which are usually incremental and limited in impact (Zortea-Johnston et al., 2012).

In sum, developing new and useful ideas is not a straightforward matter for small businesses. While the factors mainstream literature argues to be conducive for coming up with new and useful ideas (such as flat hierarchies and organic cultures) seems to be present in favourable proportions within small businesses, my discussion above shows that these factors may also, conversely, pose challenges to their attempts at developing internal strengths for building creative products. This raises questions about how small businesses come to develop creative products. While yet, little work has been done in this regard, it appears that because of these paradoxes, small businesses may not necessarily approach the processes of crafting imaginative products and services in the ways that the bulk of literature suggest.

More precisely, based on intuition and evidence from existing literature on small business behaviours discussed, I perceive that as a result of their organisational constraints, which seem to attenuate the advantages often raised in support of their internal ability to support employee creativity, small businesses' creative processes are likely to revolve around searching for and in most cases

creating opportunities to facilitate the development of novel responses (Partanen et al., 2008; Durst & Runar Edvardsson, 2012). However, as discussed, even in their search and creation of opportunities, small businesses may face inhibitions as they are often more vulnerable to conditions in their external environment, where such search and creation processes are made (Zortea-Johnson et al., 2012).

Against the vantage background of the foregoing, I now move to the next part of my discussion of background literature where I propose theoretical lenses that seem relevant for exploring the resulting ways they may approach processes that are relevant to generating new and impactful solutions.

### 3.7 Conceptual Perspectives

Characterising small businesses in terms of their creative performance, discussed in the previous section, ended with a puzzling question on how such businesses are able to develop new ideas for building competitive products. I suggested in the section that while small businesses may have behavioural advantages that they can use to support employee creativity, they are also, often, plagued by constraints that limit their ability to develop creative ideas. However, because the organisational creativity literature often studies creativity in terms of factors that promote, rather than threatens it (Zhou & Hoever, 2014), very little research attention has been done to examine what the resource, and indeed structural-constrained nature of small businesses (Baker & Nelson, 2005) mean for their creativity.

To contribute to a new and relevant reading of organisational creativity, I draw on research in entrepreneurship studies. This is fundamentally because studies in this field prioritise two issues that may be useful in shedding new light on the processes small businesses use in their attempts to develop new products and services. First, entrepreneurship studies emphasise possibilities of creating and realising new ventures out of few or no resources (Baker & Nelson, 2005). Here, attention is often paid to bricolage, processes of 'making do' with whatever is available (Baker & Nelson, 2005). In this sense, the lack or relative paucity of resources is considered a foundation or platform against which most entrepreneurship processes take off.

Similarly, although small businesses are described as operating within severely constrained work contexts (Berends et al., 2014), they seem to be able to engage in opportunities that support building imaginative products as numerous examples of how their innovative products have 'disrupted' their industries suggest (e.g. WhatsApp in the messaging sector). I consider that entrepreneurship research, which offers ways to explain how entrepreneurial organisations can create opportunities for new ventures regardless of resources they have (Markides & Chu, 2008; Mainela & Puhakka, 2011), offers deeper opportunities to explore ways small businesses similarly excel in developing creative products while working with significant limitations posed by internal and external factors.

Second, researchers within entrepreneurship studies acknowledge that rather than a sole activity, entrepreneurship processes often entail embracing and indeed, pursuing, others' resources in order to address the limitations that beset their

efforts towards innovation (Mainela & Puhakka, 2011; Baker & Nelson, 2005; Leyden & Link, 2015). Small businesses, as discussed in the previous section, are in a similar way also often keen to engage with external networks in search for inputs that offer opportunities for creating new value (Partanen et al., 2008).

Given these two conditions, I perceive that when it comes to creative processes small businesses, may take on an entrepreneurial persona, and that their search for opportunities to build novel and competitive products may similar to entrepreneurs:

‘develop over time against the backdrop of the entrepreneur’s resource constraints and social networks’. That search process can be conceived as an exploration of various combinations of inputs—knowledge, actions, and resources—that will generate the desired innovation’ (Leyden & Link, 2015: 476).

Within the entrepreneurship literature, I pay particular attention to how small businesses may create opportunities to build creative products by drawing on the work of Daniel Hjorth, who described entrepreneurship as tactical processes of creating ‘spaces’ for ‘play and/or invention’ (Hjorth, 2004; 2005). Against the background that the creation of such ‘spaces’ is aimed at accessing inputs that small businesses lack, from ‘others’ (usually external stakeholders), I also examine how studies in networks and co-creation may shed light on the entrepreneurially inclined approach to creative processes small businesses adopt.

Before I move on to examine these ideas, I briefly discuss how the phenomena of entrepreneurship and creativity are linked in order to provide more cogent reasons for the possible relevance of entrepreneurship research to my learning of small business creativity.



### 3.7.1 Creativity and Entrepreneurship

Since Schumpeter famously suggested that creativity is intrinsic to the act of entrepreneurship, a lot of research has been done that recognises links between the two (Manimala, 2008). For instance, both entrepreneurship and creativity oppose all forms of management control (Levitt, 2002). As a result, environments that support creativity may also support entrepreneurship (Florida, 2003). Quite recently, Mathews (2010) compared creativity with entrepreneurship to set the stage for more inter-subject research. He noted that both entrepreneurship and creativity rely on newness to create value in their markets, and on expertise and knowledge to challenge existing ideas of particular domains. In early stages of their processes, entrepreneurship and creativity both employ divergent thinking. In later stages, actors in entrepreneurship and creativity both need to be able to convince others of the value of their new ideas. A differentiating factor between the two is that exploitation is often peripheral in processes of creativity while it is often primary during entrepreneurial processes, for instance, in generating demand for the venture (Mathews, 2010).

Many entrepreneurship researchers, recognising these commonalities have sought a deeper learning of entrepreneurship by drawing on concepts and thinking surrounding creativity (Zhou, 2008; Fillis & Rentschler, 2010). For example, in a quantitative study of a population of undergraduate students from two universities in Greece, Zampetakis & Moustakis (2006) produced findings that suggested that students with high perceptions of their creative abilities also reported high

entrepreneurial intentions. According to the authors, this lends support to the relevance of creativity to entrepreneurship.

On the other hand, however, organisational creativity research still ‘lacks an opening towards entrepreneurship’, as not much research has been done that considers the relevance of concepts from entrepreneurship studies for deepening knowledge on creativity (Hjorth 2005: 387). Where creativity scholars acknowledge entrepreneurship in their studies, they often focus on how entrepreneurs may engage in creative activities to navigate obstacles (Amabile, 1997; Rigolizzo & Amabile, 2015). That creativity research has not fully embraced ideas from entrepreneurship may be partly explained by the fact that the study of creativity in organisational settings remains very much at development stages. As a result, researchers are still largely preoccupied with theoretical lenses from foundational disciplines from which creativity as a concept emerged, primarily psychology, without venturing much into other fields (Rosso, 2014).

My thesis attempts to leverage ideas from the field of entrepreneurship, in part, to increase opportunities for bringing into creativity research new and relevant conceptual lenses (Glăveanu, 2013). A more specific aim is to use relevant concepts from entrepreneurship to advance my understanding of organisational creativity in the context of small businesses. As noted, this is primarily because the processes that underlie both creativity and entrepreneurship are motivated by a lack of essential inputs on the one hand, and a need to search and bring together these inputs to create new value, on the other hand.

In addition to the similarity of the nature of processes that underlie creativity and entrepreneurship, there are two other specific reasons why I have drawn from the entrepreneurship literature in my learning of small businesses' creative processes. First, research in both entrepreneurship and creativity have been dominated by perspectives of the individual actor with current research in both seeking ways to shift attention to processes (Garud et al., 2014; Rosso, 2014). In performing the shift within entrepreneurial studies, Hjorth (2007: 713) emphasises the 'playful and dramatic nature' of processes of entrepreneurship, a description I suggest resonates with processes that underlie small businesses' engagement in creativity processes (as opposed to individual acts of creativity within small businesses) and holds deep possibilities for its learning.

A second reason for drawing on entrepreneurship studies is to expand the language repertoire available to describe and study organisational creativity. The language used to describe a phenomenon has significant implications for building theory by providing 'windows for seeing what was earlier hidden or missing' (Gartner, 1993: 238) and developing findings that enable reasonable dialogues with practitioners (Hjorth, 2007). To extend the knowledge we have of organisational creativity, currently limited in scope by functionalist terminologies and methodologies, I consider that the field of entrepreneurship and Hjorth's ideas hold much promise. For instance, creating 'space', one of the concepts Hjorth uses to explain entrepreneurship, similarly describes the opportunity-creating element of creative processes (Martin & Wilson, 2016), inadvertently written out of mainstream definitions. By drawing on Hjorth's conception, I develop a view of creativity not in terms of outcomes, or the efforts of individuals and groups within organisations, but

in terms of organisational engagement in actions motivated by creative goals. In this way, I respond to calls by Glăveanu (2013: 74) of the need for creativity researchers to be particularly deliberate in ‘expanding our language and consequently our thinking about the phenomenon’.

In this section, I have discussed commonalities between creativity and entrepreneurship and argued that using insights from entrepreneurial studies can enhance current understanding of organisational creativity. In the next section, I turn my attention to the conceptual tools underlying Hjorth’s works in entrepreneurship, noting the huge influence of de Certeau’s (1984; 1984; 2005) research ideas.

### 3.7.2 Hjorth, de Certeau – Spatial Concepts (Strategy, Place, Tactics, Spaces)

In order to fully appreciate Hjorth’s views and its relevance to my understanding of organisational creativity, I first briefly discuss de Certeau’s original work, based on which Hjorth’s research in entrepreneurship is based.

Having studied marginal groups of various cultures, de Certeau gained an interest in how such groups survive (de Certeau, 1984). Specifically, he sought ways to explain the ways the ‘weak’, as he calls the marginalised, operate when under the rule and principles of the strong and powerful (de Certeau, 1984). Thus, while de Certeau highlighted the agency the ‘weak’ exercised, his focus was not so much on those being subjected, as it was on the ‘ways of operating’ such people used to create opportunities (de Certeau, 1984). By focusing on actions rather than people, de Certeau’s writings already seem relevant to guide researchers who are keen to study organisational phenomenon as processes of engaging in relevant actions, as

some creativity researchers seek to do (Drazin et al., 1999; Hargadon & Bechky 2006). According to de Certeau, the 'weak' responds to their impositions by re-assigning the impositions of their dominant orders to other uses, which are usually novel and beneficial.

An example de Certeau used to illustrate his point is how the Indians, while being colonised by the Spanish, sought ways to use the same laws their Spanish leaders imposed on them in ways that became advantageous for their survival (de Certeau, 1984). Other examples he cites include how travellers may reuse urban spaces for other purposes than those intended by urban planners, or how shoppers may recreate other uses out of their purchases from supermarkets, other than what producers intended (de Certeau, 1984). Using these illustrations, de Certeau attempted to shift attention from the hegemonic discourses of the controlling power of systems and structures (called 'producers' in the original formulation of the theory) in shaping everyday phenomena, to make way for the imaginativeness of the ruled (users in the original formulation). To an extent, his ideas resonate with Boje et al. (2015) who similarly proposed the need to reconsider dominant narratives available to explain daily phenomena to open discussion of less accounted but potentially insightful aspects of these stories. These less accounted aspects according to Boje usually entail powerful interventions of 'little people' in re-crafting daily situations (Boje et al., 2015).

To expound his perspective on the ways the 'weak' survive, de Certeau proposed four spatial concepts that capture the dichotomous relationship between the weak and the strong; 'strategy' and 'place' on the one hand, and 'tactics' and

'space' on the other. de Certeau defined 'strategy' as an independent system of power relationships that provides a place to manage relations with external ties (Brownlie & Hower, 2011). It is thus the 'dominant order' which stipulates and guides behaviour based on what it considers to be expedient (Dey & Teasdale, 2015). For example, an organisation, a government and an army are all kinds of a 'strategy' because they are autonomous and distinct, are defined by power relations and offer a place they guide decisions and actions for relating with external factors (customers, international bodies and adversaries respectively). Elsewhere in the application of de Certeau's ideas, the 'strategy' is referred to as the 'producer' to describe the power it wields because of what it offers to the 'user' or the 'weak' (Swalwell, 2012). In essence, the strategy, taking different forms, imposes certain rules and principles on the weak who cannot survive without them.

To exercise its authority over the 'weak', the 'strategy' establishes and operates through a 'place'. A 'place', according to de Certeau ensures the orderly functioning of each of the elements represented in the strategy. It offers a stable environment to implement the guidelines and principles of the 'strategy' (Brownlie & Hower, 2011). For instance, government departments and agencies may be considered a 'place' for the government to carry out its activities in ruling people. Owing to the efficiency that the dominant strategy desires, its 'place' usually wrestles against all forms of actions that are disruptive and that do not align with the producer of strategy's aim.

'Tactics' on the other hand are the 'dispersed everyday creativity' that the people, or the weak engage in (Dey & Teasdale, 2015: 489). It is a term that de

Certeau used to capture the strength and acts the 'weak' uses to recreate other uses out of their impositions in order to survive (Siu, 2003). In this sense, 'tactics' wields a different kind of power from the strategy; the power to create 'spaces' for unintended uses within the gaps left open in the established order of the 'strategy'. In other words, 'Tactics' may be used to describe how people imaginatively reassign the prescribed rules or principles, set out by the 'strategy', into something else for their own uses (de Certeau, 1984).

The final spatial concept de Certeau proposed is 'spaces'. 'Spaces' are what the 'weak' tactically creates in the 'imposed places'. Such spaces enable the weak to engage in improvised activities that are often different from what the 'strategy' intended. They are often suffused with acts that disrupt the stability of the 'place' (Hjorth, 2005).

Although highly metaphorical, de Certeau's ideas have been fruitfully applied by several scholars. Here researchers have had a common aim of explaining actions that the weak (applied variously to describe those without power, strength or influence, and those under others with strength and influence) use to respond to impositions they work under. For instance, the weak have been considered to engage in tactically creating opportunities for spontaneous, liberal and useful actions within established and powerful systems, such as metropolitan cities, fashion industries, and political systems (De Souza e Silva & Hjorth, 2009, Gorgulu, 2015, Siu, 2003, Petitgand, 2016).

It is important to note that although the original formulation of the theory used the term 'strategy' to describe powerful institutions that impose authoritative rules on

‘subjects’ (de Certeau, 1984), subsequent usage has applied the term to other ‘authorities’ whose rules and principles are not explicitly aimed at imposing debilitating power on the ‘weak’. Sui (2003), for instance, gives everyday examples of how ‘strategy’ may operate on a day to day basis as a way of guiding behaviour for the common good. For example, she notes how city planners in Hong Kong, seeking to guide pedestrian activities, originally built footbridges for pedestrian traffic. However, assuming the position of the ‘weak’, pedestrians made other uses out of the footbridge by turning them into a venue for social gatherings. In the same way, the term ‘tactics’ has been adopted in multiple fields to describe various forms of expression that silently or clandestinely resist impositions, by using those same impositions for different ends (Gorgulu, 2015). As Dey & Teasdale (2015) note, such adaptations of his original concepts are a provision de Certeau himself made for research that is subsequently based on his work.

So far in this sub-section, I have discussed de Certeau’s research based on which Hjorth’s conception and study of entrepreneurial processes are founded. I have also identified examples of ways de Certeau’s ideas have been applied by researchers seeking to study how those who are disadvantaged are able to create opportunities for survival. In the next section, I focus more directly on discussing Hjorth’s notions of how entrepreneurship processes unfold when de Certeau’s spatial concepts are used as an interpretive lens.

### 3.7.3 Entrepreneurship Processes: Creating ‘Spaces’ in ‘Ordered Places’

Within entrepreneurship studies, Hjorth has re-appropriated de Certeau’s spatial concepts to study and analyse how processes relevant for creating new



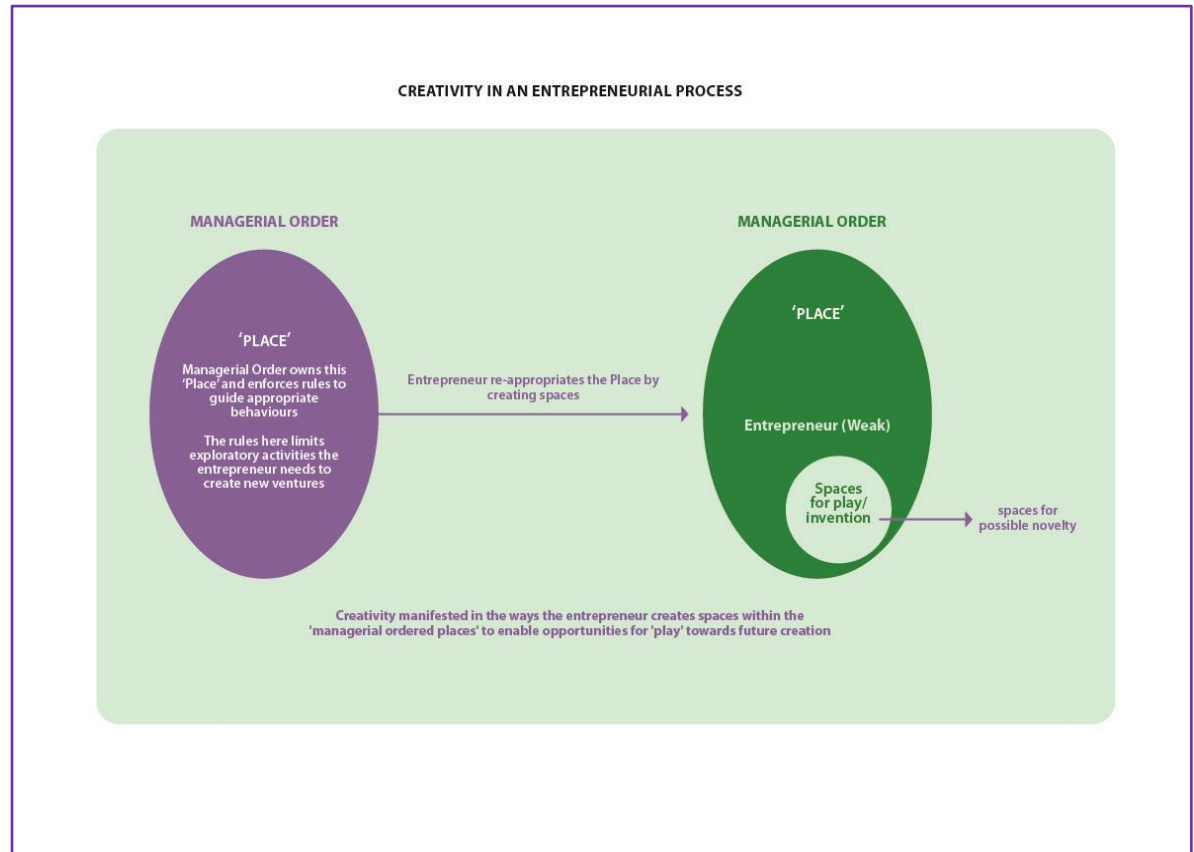
ventures may unfold in the context of organisations. Hjorth pays particular attention to inevitable tensions that exist between 'strategy' and 'place' on one hand (which he uses to capture established managerial orders), and 'tactics' and 'spaces' on the other (representing tactical actions to subvert the rules of the managerial places) (Sundin & Tillmar, 2008).

According to Hjorth, organisations are essentially 'imposed systems' where management establishes governable 'places' to ensure efficient actions that maximise economic value for the organisation (Hjorth, 2004). Because of the desire to be efficient, the organisation ensures that its 'place', which Hjorth describes as a fixed location (e.g. the financial system's place would be a bank), imposes restrictions on activities that may detract from managerial goals. For instance, activities that require experimentation and exploration are discouraged because they are considered disruptive and against the original intention of the 'place'.

Given that processes underlying entrepreneurship are aimed at inventing new ventures, they usually entail activities that detract from the stability of the 'place' in which they operate. As a result, entrepreneurship processes are naturally not embraced by the 'strategic' or established order. In another sense, management, acting as a strategy, sets up a 'place' which imposes its principles of efficiency on entrepreneurial processes, making entrepreneurial individuals, teams and organisations 'weak'. Thus, to create new ventures within the ordered 'place', entrepreneurial individuals, teams and organisations need to engage in deliberate acts of tactically making other uses out of their managerial 'impositions' (Petitgand, 2016). According to Hjorth, these other uses are usually in terms of creating 'spaces'

where activities towards new possibilities, activities for play and/or invention are organised (Hjorth, 2004; 2005). As a result of the potential for 'play' within the 'spaces' entrepreneurial processes create to lead to new practices, they have also been called creative spaces or spaces for creative action (Driver, 2008). In a sense, entrepreneurship processes resist the conformity and disciplining logics of established orders by creating opportunities where they can carry out activities towards new creations (Driver, 2008). In Figure 3.1., I illustrate Hjorth's conceptions of how creativity is manifested in the ways in which entrepreneurs re-appropriate the 'place' of their 'managerial orders', and create 'spaces' for 'play', with the aim of developing new creations. I describe the creation of 'spaces' as a 'creative' action because it enhances possibilities for novelty to emerge in a 'place' that would on its own, not be able to induce such outcomes.

Figure 3.1: Creativity in Entrepreneurial Processes: Creating Spaces for Play



Source: Author (Based on Hjorth's Conceptions)

By using the spatial concepts of 'place' and 'spaces', Hjorth's study of entrepreneurship places the entrepreneurial research spotlight on the processes that underlie creating new ventures—which he describes as actions carried out by the 'entrepreneurial weak' to create 'spaces' for 'play and invention' (Hjorth, 2004). This is opposed to the conventional approach to studying entrepreneurship, which focuses on management's ability to influence individual entrepreneurial actions by manipulating factors within organisational contexts, or on outcomes of the entrepreneurial process (Hjorth, 2005). Focusing on the ways entrepreneurship processes unfold, that is, their 'becoming', (Hjorth & Johannisson, 2007), is a

powerful way to study entrepreneurship, as it incorporates knowledge of multiple contextual conditions that shape possible new creations, offering insightful ways to understand entrepreneurship as a situated and context-specific process (Hjorth, 2007, Hjorth et al., 2015).

Another perspective underlying Hjorth's application of de Certeau's conceptual tools relates to his argument about the opportunities that entrepreneurship processes capitalise on to create new ventures. Contrasting received views that entrepreneurship opportunities lie around, waiting to be discovered (Shane, 2003), Hjorth argues that entrepreneurship opportunities are created (Hjorth, 2005). Specifically, that entrepreneurial 'opportunities are rather created in an ensemble of time in an already arranged order – in a place often prepared for something else' (Hjorth, 2005: 387). By 'a place often prepared for something else', he refers to how organisational contexts, due to their primary aim of being efficient environments, are unable to offer the inputs entrepreneurs need (whether in the form of resources, freedom to act, etc) (Sundin & Tillmar, 2008, Levitt, 2002). Within such contexts, the onus of creating opportunities falls on the entrepreneur; a responsibility they carry out by bringing together resources or practices needed to create the new venture through activities of 'play and/or invention' in the 'spaces' they create. This act of bringing new practices to places that, left to their own devices, could not generate them is what Spinoza et al. (1999) refer to as cross-appropriation.

A final, but noteworthy point relating to how Hjorth applied de Certeau's ideas is his emphasis on the activities that occur in the 'spaces' entrepreneurship

processes create, that is, activities of 'play and/ or invention'. Both 'play' and 'invention' are useful activities entrepreneurs use to create new ventures. In my discussion here, I focus on 'play', as it may have contested definitions due to its use in multiple contexts to mean different things.

Some researchers have defined 'play' as 'purposeless activities', and have thus distinguished it from other kinds of organisational activities, which they consider as relatively more serious 'work', able to lead to relevant outcomes (Kolb & Kolb, 2010, Bekoff & Byers, 1998). However, others have drawn attention to the fact that play, in the form of tactics can be used to transform the powers strategies wield in ways that result in equally impactful results for the 'weak' (De Souza e Silva & Hjorth, 2009; Hjorth, 2005). They have thus called for the need to shift our conceptions of 'play' from traditional representations that characterise it as 'unserious activity' towards treating it as a significant activity that can potentially result in new creations, either by departing from the more serious and usually routine activities of the 'place', or bringing into it practices that did not exist (Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006; Popova-Novak, 2010).

According to Hjorth, entrepreneurship processes create spaces for 'play' to actualise new practices' within managerially determined places (Hjorth, 2005: 387). This is motivated by exploratory and discovery goals, rather than specifically defined goals of efficiency (Kark, 2011). In this sense, using the term 'play' to describe activities within the 'spaces' entrepreneurship processes create has the distinctive ability to draw attention to processes that underlie coming up with imaginative outcomes, rather than the outcomes of such processes (Kark, 2011).

In the next section, I draw attention to some limitations of Hjorth's works. I then follow with a discussion of how Hjorth's ideas may be useful for illuminating processes of small businesses' creative processes.

#### 3.7.4 Critiquing Hjorth's Conception of Entrepreneurship

Hjorth's application of de Certeau's ideas, like most other theorisation of organisational phenomena, is limited in a number of ways. In my discussion, I purposefully discuss three limitations that directly affect the ways I use his views on entrepreneurship for my learning of organisational creative processes.

Hjorth considers that in business environments, 'place' is the delineated site where managerial authorities carry out their activities (Hjorth, 2004). This seems to imply that 'place' is only found within the internal boundaries of organisations, and that managerial orders will only be exercised by managers or business owners, while those seeking to create entrepreneurship processes will be employees or customers. For instance, he suggests that the 'place' of a financial authority is the banking office or hall, as it is through this location that the financial authority 'governs' its customers by setting out principles and guidelines for them (Hjorth, 2005).

I suggest that because of relatively recent developments in how work is organised in some industries, 'place', as applied to organisational contexts, may no longer be limited to internal work environments. Organisations operate in highly competitive and dynamic markets (O'Regan & Kling, 2011), which require them to be adept at various competencies in order to address the overwhelming multiplicity

of demands they face (Granstrand et al., 1997). Thus, successful firm performance has largely come to depend on the ability to create avenues that allow businesses to gain competencies they need but lack. In line with this, organisational boundaries are increasingly becoming porous (Boxer, 2014), with businesses fashioning their activities to permeate functional areas, not just within their own organisational boundaries but also in interactions they have with their external environments (Bartone & Linton Wells, 2009). This shift is particularly applicable to organisations whose competitive advantage lie in continuous exploration (OECD, 2010). For such firms, frequent interactions with external environments (e.g. suppliers, customers) prominently feature in day-to-day operations as they seek to explore alternative ways of gaining value (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Owing to the gradual weakening of traditional firm boundaries, businesses are becoming more open and sensitive to factors within wider industry and economic environments. In this sense, managerial orders can be exercised by authorities or strategies embedded within industries and markets as these orders provide guidelines on how individual businesses should operate (Dey & Teasdale, 2015). Thus, whole businesses are being governed by the norms and principles of wider environments (such as industries, markets, governments), and hence, are assuming the position of the 'weak'. In sum, when Hjorth's ideas are placed within contemporary business environments, there seems to be a need to redefine the 'weak', who operate under managerial orders but create opportunities for new ventures, and the 'strong', who impose principles and norms on the 'weak'.

Second is a lack of clarity on who exactly engages in entrepreneurial processes, and which 'actors' operate in 'spaces'. Owing to Hjorth's strong aim to shift attention to the actions that underlie entrepreneurial processes rather than who performs those actions (Hjorth, 2007), he is mostly silent in his definitions on who performs those actions or the unit of analysis underlying his conceptions. This is similar to de Certeau's (1984) study as his use of the term 'weak' or 'user' to describe those who respond to their impositions by creating 'spaces', is variously applied to either customers, nations, marginalised cultures, and in some cases travellers in cities.

In my research, which seeks to explore the nature and processes of creativity at the level of the organisation, my emphasis and unit of analysis is on how organisations themselves carry out actions of 'creating spaces' that may possibly lead to new and useful outcomes, that is creative processes at the level of the organisation. Perhaps, Hjorth's suggestion that 'no longer are we looking for creative individuals simply...instead collective and organisational creativity are needed' (Hjorth et al., 2015: 1), lends support to my chosen level of analysis at the collective level of organisations.

This has implications for identifying actors who operate in 'spaces'. If organisations can assume the place of the 'weak' and create 'spaces' for 'play' within 'managerial orders' in the ways Hjorth suggests, then it will also appear that such organisations and enterprises are the main actors which govern such 'spaces'. However, whether such actors act alone in these 'openings' (Brownlie & Hower, 2011) is not clearly articulated by Hjorth (2004) and de Certeau (1984). Against the



background that the 'weak' often creates 'spaces' to be able to lead activities that make future novel creations possible, then it will be expected that they 'invite' others to collaborate with them in such 'spaces'. This is in line with broader perspectives on how contemporary organisations are increasingly approaching new value creation as a networked activity (Bilton, 2010). However, without empirical work to examine these, as my study seeks to do, they remain mere anecdotes. Thirdly, Hjorth approaches entrepreneurship solely as a process of creating opportunities rather than discovering them (Hjorth, 2005). Since long, there has been an unresolved discussion as to whether entrepreneurship opportunities exist independent of entrepreneurial actions or whether entrepreneurial actions, through ongoing interactions, create these opportunities (Alvarez & Barney, 2007). The argument of entrepreneurship as creation has received a lot of support by opportunity creation theorists who argue that entrepreneurship is about creating opportunities rather than mere discovery of opportunities (Alvarez & Barney, 2007, Kirzner, 1997). However, by approaching opportunities merely as opportunity creation, Hjorth seems to disregard chances or 'gaps'—cracks in the surveillance of the established orders—that are left by the 'established ordered place', upon which entrepreneurial processes capitalise to engage in practices that may lead to new creations (Hjorth, 2005: 391). Without discovering these 'gaps' or chances, it would be impossible for entrepreneurial processes to create spaces in the first place. In this way, it appears relevant to take a balanced view of the opportunities that are relevant for creating new and useful outcomes by acknowledging that both actions of discovery and creation are useful (Martin & Wilson, 2016).

Having discussed Hjorth's works in entrepreneurship studies, I now move on to discuss how his ideas, particularly, his spatial concepts, may support an alternative understanding of organisational creativity.

### 3.7.5 Hjorth's Conception and Organisational Creativity

Hjorth makes several references to organisational creativity, arguing that research on the topic can significantly benefit from his 'novel reading of entrepreneurship' (Hjorth, 2005). This is not least because similar to some creativity researchers (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999), Hjorth conceptualises entrepreneurship as organisational creativity (Puhakka, 2012; Hjorth, 2007), specifically describing it as a 'form of social creativity, as a tactical art of creating space for play and/or invention within an established order, to actualise new practices' (Hjorth, 2005: 387). Accordingly, the bulk of his thesis in explaining entrepreneurship recognises links between the two phenomena. For instance, in elaborating the 'spaces' entrepreneurship creates within established orders, he explains that they 'offer spaces for imagination, for creation and for everyday creativity' (Hjorth, 2005: 392).

Aside Hjorth's explicit link of entrepreneurship to creativity, there are some indicative themes from his work(s) that are relevant for my study of organisational creativity. The first relates to his definition of entrepreneurship as acts of creating 'spaces for play and/or invention' within 'established orders'. Hjorth describes these 'spaces' as sites the 'weak' creates to engage in activities that may result in future creation or invention (Hjorth, 2004). In this sense, 'spaces' are created using carefully thought out strategies by the 'weak' to make other uses out of the impositions 'established orders' set out for them (Lange, 2011).

The resonance of this with processes that underlie creativity in the context of formal organisations seems clear as most business environments are fashioned to ensure orderliness and efficiency (Stenfors & Tanner, 2006; Levitt, 2002; Baer, 2012; Amabile, 1998). The resulting disciplining role of such environments makes it impossible to approach activities that may be relevant for developing new products as mere chance events. Indeed, within such 'places', those (organisations) seeking to create original and relevant products, services or responses, would likely assume the disposition of the 'weak' (because they operate within the disciplining guidelines of their wider business environments), and deliberately and/or tactically, engage in activities that have expected value. In other words, when 'managerially ordered places' meet tactical behaviours of organisations in creating 'spaces' for creative action, there is potential to actualise new and useful outcomes (Lange, 2011).

Next, Hjorth's description of the activities of 'play', carried out in the 'spaces' entrepreneurship processes create, highlights the distinctive nature of experimentation and exploratory activities that take place as part of efforts to build original and relevant products. In reviewing the mainstream creativity literature in Chapter 2, I showed how research attention has been paid to inputs (employees and structural organisational factors) and outcomes (new and useful ideas) of creative processes with relatively little work done to examine the organisational processes that are relevant for creating those outcomes. I also discussed how marginal literature, led by Drazin et al. (1999) and Banks et al. (2003), have argued for the need to pay equal attention to actions and processes that underlie generating new and useful ideas, as they can in themselves offer ways to deepen current understanding of organisational creativity. By emphasising actions that take place

within the creative 'spaces', Hjorth, inspired by de Certeau helps me to shift attention to engagement in creative activities, and how creative processes unfold, away from prevailing lines of research in organisational creativity.

Thirdly, Hjorth's approach to studying entrepreneurship as processes of creating 'spaces', which I draw on to explore organisational creative processes, helps address the problem of privileging macro-managerial perspectives, when explaining organisational creativity, at the expense of micro-processes organisations use to build imaginative responses and solutions (Blomberg, 2014). The common approach to studying organisational creativity emphasises management role in providing a conducive environment for employees to engage in creative actions without seeking other perspectives to study and explain how organisations come to develop new and useful ideas (Chapter 2). By emphasising the actual processes and activities that underlie new venture creation, Hjorth's works are useful for drawing attention to actions that may underpin the possible development of new and useful ideas by organisations, but do not necessarily proceed from management actions within organisations. In other words, since the creativity literature remains largely dominated by a functionalist and managerial orientation, my research, which draws on Hjorth's emphasis on engagement in actions towards new creation, is among a few that purposely presents an alternative view of creativity among small businesses, with an aim to unveil what is obscured by prevailing reductionist discourses.

The fourth important theme relates to methods for examining creativity by organisations. Hjorth suggests the narrative method as an alternative approach to

recount the social and processual nature of entrepreneurship and creativity (Hjorth, 2007). Narratives act as 'storehouses of practices and reflections thereon' and thus, capture the dramatic and social elements of creative processes as they unfold (Hjorth, 2007: 713). They offer qualitatively different insights that provide opportunities for a deep understanding of organisational processes than the survey and laboratory methods that largely pervade the bulk of organisational creativity literature (Zhou & Hoever, 2014). Traditional functionalist methods to studying organisational creativity usually result in a list of possible ways individual and group creativity can be stimulated without much attention to practical situations organisations confront, in enacting the prescriptions of such lists (Chilcott & Barry, 2016). On the other hand, narrative approaches provide opportunities to develop situated knowledge that focuses on the nuanced, localised stories of practitioners and resonates with their experiences (Garud et al., 2014).

In sum, Hjorth sought to create a 'space' for an alternative reading of organisational creativity through his works in entrepreneurship. However, creativity researchers are yet to give attention to the relevance of these ideas. As I discussed in section 3.6.1, this seems to reflect a general reluctance by organisational creativity researchers to look beyond foundational disciplines, such as psychology, in extending current knowledge of organisational creativity. My research contributes to an alternative reading of creativity by taking the methodological route of using narratives, suggested by Hjorth (2007).

Clearly, Hjorth's approach to studying entrepreneurship processes, particularly, his emphasis on the actions entrepreneurs engage in, offer valuable insights to the study of organisational creativity.

In the penultimate section of this chapter, I focus on a second element within entrepreneurship studies that offers opportunities for a deeper learning of small businesses' creative processes. This, as noted, has to do with drawing on others' resources in order for entrepreneurs to create new ventures. In my discussion, I show how the 'spaces' Hjorth identified to be linked to entrepreneurship processes, and hence useful for my learning of small businesses' creative processes, may be established to access the resources that entrepreneurs themselves lack.

### **3.8 Organisational Creativity – Co-Creating with Networks**

As I previously noted, Hjorth et al. (2015) in more recent work observed that the focus of creativity studies is gradually shifting to collective ways of developing new solutions to organisational problems. In addition, the entrepreneurship literature in which his work is situated, and which I suggest offers tools to study creativity in the processes constrained organisations use to achieve their goals, draws attention to the fact that creatively seeking for ways to engage with networks (and their inputs) is fundamental to entrepreneurial processes. This is because such engagement offers ways for individuals and organisations to access resources they would otherwise not have to navigate their ever-changing environments (Partanen et al., 2008; Zahra & Nambisan, 2012). In fact, in the more broader literature of strategic thinking, networks and ecosystems are considered as offering opportunities for firms to bring together their skills and resources to create competitive value that any of them, relying on their own assets as an individual enterprise, may have realised (Eisenhardt & Galunic, 2000; Clarysse et al., 2014).

Based on these developments in our understanding of how organisations are increasingly lowering their firm boundaries to develop more competitive offerings, I introduce, in this section, an additional lens that helps to capture the ways entrepreneurs or the ‘weak’ may tactically act to bring resources from others into the ‘spaces’ they create (de Certeau, 1984). I consider here how these networks may be used to address the limitations the ‘weak’ face, especially when such limitations relate to paucity of resources. Specifically, I discuss work done on co-creation, which explain how organisations are increasingly engaging with a number of actors within

and outside of their enterprises to create new value. This literature is useful for furthering discussions on how as part of their creative processes, small constrained businesses may operate in ways that allow them to tap into the inputs of their networks to build new and useful products, in spite of their own limitations. Thus, while co-creation may lead organisations to achieve products, ideas or solutions that are new and valuable, I focus on considering how it is astutely and creatively used in the processes small constrained businesses engage in when faced with limitations.

Management researchers have drawn attention to the fact that internal resources alone do not suffice to explain firm performance. This is partly because businesses operate in competitive and dynamic markets (O'Regan & Kling, 2011), which require them to be adept at various competencies in order to meet the overwhelming multiplicity of demands markets place on them (Granstrand et al., 1997). Thus, successful firm performance has largely come to depend on the ability to create avenues to acquire competencies businesses need but lack. Taking the view that firms are embedded in a wider social context (Lin et al., 2009), this group of researchers have highlighted the centrality and value of interactions with external actors as one distinctive avenue for gaining such resources and competencies (Zhou et al., 2009). For example, organisations aware of their embeddedness in external and institutional environments may use strategies, such as M&A to control resources that support their ability to compete, and indeed thrive (Lin et al., 2009).

In response, theories prioritising the relevance of networks for creating competitive value for firms have gradually emerged studying how firms accrue



essential resources for improved performance from external sources. Innovation scholars have especially welcome the value of firms' interactions with their networks, arguing that knowledge, the most important resource for novel and competitive products, is not confined to the internal boundaries of the firm (Björk & Magnusson, 2009). It can be sourced from anywhere opportunities exist for knowledge creation, which may be within firms or from external sources, such as customers, collaborators and suppliers (Björk & Magnusson, 2009). Thus, instead of the emphasis on R&D departments within corporations to be the source of ideas in most traditional approaches to building highly impactful solutions, Cooper & Edgett (2009: 19-20) suggest that such goals are 'now a business function or activity requiring the involvement of everyone in the business and even those external to, but affiliated with, your business'. This stance is echoed strongly by current research on open innovation, which draws attention to how firms in the current business environment set up porous boundaries to allow innovative ideas to move and be commercialised either from the internal or external work environment of the focal firm (Chesbrough, 2006).

One of the relevant themes that have developed from discussions on how the interactions organisations have with their networks may be a creative way for firms to accomplish goals relating to building novel products is that of co-creation. This concept, considered by some to be a form of open-innovation (Frow et al., 2015), captures how enterprises create competitive value with various stakeholders, including customers, suppliers, competitors and financiers (Ramaswamy and Oczan, 2014). To co-create value, enterprises, especially resource-constrained

ones deliberately build engagement platforms, sometimes technology-mediated ones (e.g. live meetings, community spaces, website exchanges) to interact with stakeholders with the hope of creating new value (McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017; Frow et al., 2015). Essentially, co-creation 'changes the locus of value creation from inside the company to collaborative interactions that lie beyond the firm boundaries' (Frow et al., 2015: 4). In other words, organisations that co-create are not firm or product-centric, and do not treat their work environment as the sole site of value-creation. In addition, stakeholders are not considered passive onlookers of value created elsewhere (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014). Instead, each stakeholder is seen as a resource, as well as a budding opportunity for the organisation to create new value.

While a number of stakeholders have been studied for their contribution to enterprise co-creation activities, customers have received the most research attention (Von Hippel, 2005, Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). This is particularly so in the innovation literature, where the concept of co-creation was initially introduced to describe how firms can leverage the interactions they share with customers for building imaginative products. The emphasis on customers as co-creators of value may be partly explained by the fact that most value creation activities innovative organisations undertake are targeted at new products and services that offer outstanding customer experiences (Echeverri & Skalen, 2011).

Thus, in contrast to the previous passive roles customers held in the value they receive from their business providers, they are increasingly becoming empowered to take part in personalised interactions with organisations to create unique value that they need and prefer (O'Hern & Aric Rindfleisch, 2008). As

Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2014: 280) observed, co-creating value is not about 'build it and they'll come', instead, it is 'build it with them, and they're already there'. The main expectation for customers, which proponents of this paradigm of creating value espouse, then, has been the unique value that co-creation could allow organisations to offer customers (Cova et al., 2011). In this sense, co-creation, which draws on personalised contributions from individual consumers is expected to lead to personalised, non-standardised value for each consumer, in ways that contrast with the value offered by mass customisation efforts (Cova et al., 2011).

Situating this in current conversations of organisational creativity, it appears that prevailing definitions of creative organisations, as organisations that differ from others 'in that their product is creativity, customers or clients come to them for new ideas, fresh approaches, creative concepts' (Pierson, 1983: 13), seem to have shifted in the current paradigm of co-creative organisations. In this new era, development of novel and competitive ideas and solutions is no longer the preserve of so-called creative organisations. Instead, creative organisations seem to be those who seek creative ways to engage with product users in order to address their, often, ill-defined problems.

To aid my discussion of various factors that come into play when organisations co-create with their customers, I study Frow et al.'s (2015) design framework, which summarises common dimensions and categories of value co-creation and shows various opportunities for co-creating that organisations can capitalise on. This is presented in Table 3.1. Frow et al. (2015) have discussed each of the dimensions and categories in detail. Thus, I will not repeat them in my review.

However, it is worth making some general points on how the framework furthers our understanding of co-creation. According to the authors, the co-creation design framework presents co-creation alternatives which can be variously combined by lead actors or enterprises. For instance, an organisation that is motivated by accessing resources and enhancing customer experiences may engage with co-conception of ideas with their product users through a digital application engagement platform.

**Table 3.1: A Framework for Co-Creation Designs**

Categories	Dimensions					
	Co-creation Motives	Co-Creation Forms	Engaging Actors	Engagement Platforms	Level of engagement	Duration of Engagement
	Access to resources	Co-conception of ideas	Focal firm	Digital Application	Cognitive	One-off
	Enhance customer Experience	Co-production	Customer	Tool or product	Emotional	Recurring
	Create customer commitment	Co-promotion	Partner	Physical Resources, Space/ Events	Behavioural	Continuous
	Enable self service	Co-pricing	Competitors	Joint processes		
	Create more competitive offerings	Co-distribution	Influencer	Personnel Groups		
	Decrease cost	Co-consumption				
	Faster time to market	Co-outsourcing				
	Build brand awareness	Co-disposal				
		Co-experience				
		Co-meaning				

Source: Adapted from Frow et al. (2015)

The lead actors may then elicit behavioural levels of engagement and pursue recurring engagements with product users, given that this is proven to lead to more sustainable value creation outcomes. In addition, for co-creation to successfully lead to the creation of new value, Frow et al. (2015) suggest the need for lead firms to pay particular attention to platforms that offer distinctive opportunities to access and create value. This should be hard to imitate. Secondly, both lead organisations and customers should be equally aware and define what participation involves. For example, questions of processes that will be used, specific mechanisms to aid interactions and goals should be addressed by both parties. Finally, co-creation should be well-planned rather than left to unfold on its own, which could be a risky venture.

For the purposes of my research, I use Frow et al.'s (2015) framework to capture the various possibilities available to lead firms which engage in co-creation. Beyond this however, I also use his framework as a way to articulate strategic actions that define organisations' co-creation efforts.

In the next sub-section, I move on to discuss some assumptions of co-creation, its advantages and critiques.

### 3.8.1 Assumptions of Value Co-Creation

One of the underlying assumptions of co-creation that differentiates it from traditional value creation of ideas is that, value of a product is not determined while it is being developed in terms of how well it performs, but rather is constructed while being used by the end user (Lin et al., 2009). Essentially, during the use of a product,

customers assess its value based on the product's performance as well as on how other complements that are used together with the product perform (Adner & Kapoor, 2016; Grönroos & Voima, 2012). Adner & Kapoor (2016) give an example of how customers will assess the value of an electric car they bought based on its as-use performance. In this scenario, how easy it is to access charging facilities to recharge the battery of the car. Given that such value is only possible during the use of the product, value creation cannot be isolated from the customer as it is in their use of the product, that the value of the product is constructed.

An additional underlying logic of co-creating with customers comes from the organisational creativity literature (Mohrenweiser & Uschi Backes-Gellner, 2010). Creativity researchers consider autonomy as a key antecedent that influences individuals and teams to develop new ideas (Rigolizzo & Amabile, 2015). This is because when granted autonomy in their tasks, individuals are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation that encourages them to seek creative ways of undertaking those tasks (Amabile, 2012). In a similar sense, empowering customers to engage in activities that result in creating new value, such as during product development processes, is expected to challenge and excite them to engage in suggesting new, and often radical ideas (O'Hern & Rinderfleisch, 2008).

A third assumption underlying the co-creation paradigm is that the extent at which stakeholders are included in co-creation activities will influence the nature of the value that is created (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014). Thus, while Frow et al.'s (2015) Framework identify one-off, recurring and continuous extents of engagements as alternatives that are at the disposal of lead actors, researchers

suggest that for organisations and their customers to fully exploit the advantages of co-creation, there should be systematic efforts to ensure ongoing interactions, as one-off interactions may not yield expected results (Zhang & Chen, 2008).

### 3.8.2 Co-creation – Advantages and Critique

According to proponents of the co-creation paradigm, organisations which successfully co-create with their product users can reap advantages that would have been impossible otherwise. First, by partnering with customers, enterprises may experience a reduction in cost of creating value, as well as opportunities to improve organisational efficiency (O'Hern & Rindfleisch, 2008). This is primarily because co-creation draws useful and often ground-breaking ideas from customers, offering ways to identify overlooked opportunities, without the need to invest huge amounts of capital that is often needed for R&D aimed at meeting these aims (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2014). In this way, co-creation can offer ways for organisations to build and enhance possibilities for developing valuable and novel outcomes at little internal cost (Frow et al., 2015). Second and relatedly, co-creation offers organisations or enterprises opportunities to build their own competencies. This is especially so when the value created results in strengthening the organisations' own capabilities by providing sets of competencies they lack (Zhang & Chen, 2008). Third, co-creation is considered by the bulk of innovation and technology management scholars to be a useful way of enhancing customer participation and offering better, and more competitive services to them (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014). This is argued by some marketing and consumer researchers to be especially so when

customers are properly engaged, empowered and involved in the co-creation process (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014).

Notwithstanding these advantages, some researchers have argued that co-creation may not always be an appropriate form of creating value, partly due to implications it has on customers when they are used as 'engaging actors' (Frow et al., 2015). Before I proceed to discuss some of the critiques that have been raised, it is worth noting that while the critiques that have been levelled against co-creation activities, especially against lead actors' motives, suggest various implications for business ethics, my purpose of discussing them here is to illuminate the clandestine, manipulative and often opportunistic nature of the creative actions that small businesses may pursue in their journey towards accessing inputs they require (de Certeau, 1984).

First of all, in a bid to shift away from the traditional firm-centric approach to value creation, some organisations end up shifting or outsourcing the entire responsibility and efforts needed for creating new value to the customer (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). This burdens the customer and compromises on the expected benefits that personalising co-creation experiences are expected to offer to them (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). In relation to this, some customers may consider organisations' attempts to engage them in co-creation activities as offering value to the organisation to improve on its processes at their expense. Some researchers go as far as to suggest that co-creation, which draws on customers as partners in creating value manipulates and exploits them to the benefit of the business (Cova et al., 2011). This may even be true for situations when customers



are willing and seem to enjoy their role in the process of co-creation (Cova et al., 2011), because they are not remunerated for their creative-relevant processes and their cooperation (Arvidsson, 2005). In addition, customers may end up paying more for the value that they have willingly co-created, compared to standardised products and services.

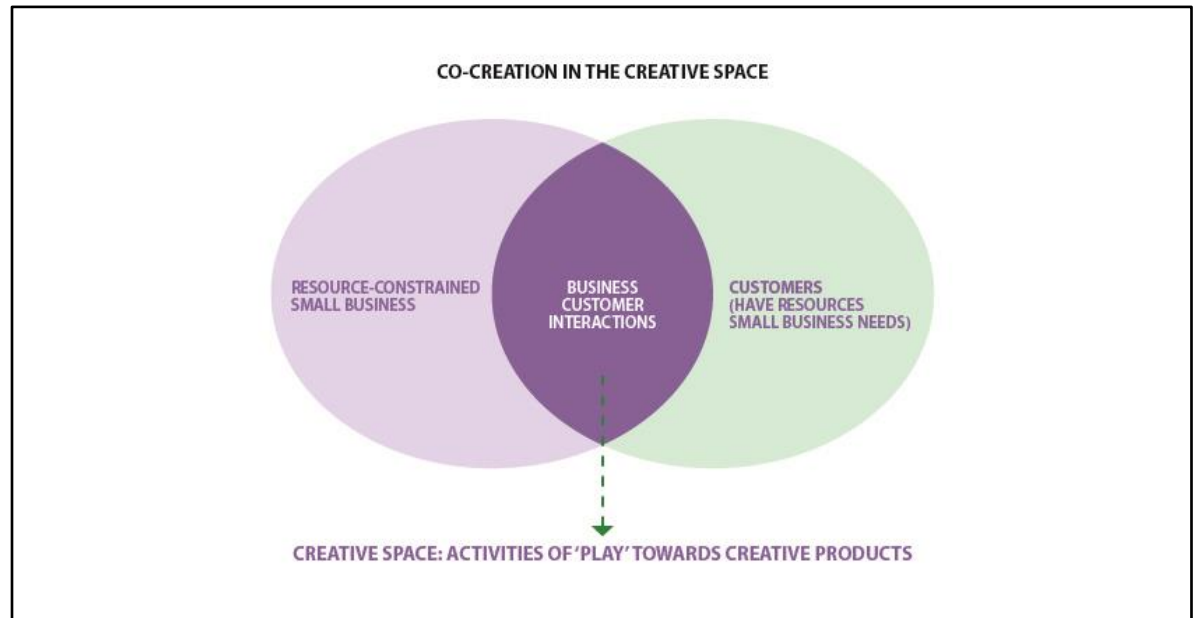
According to Bonsu and Darmody (2008), most co-creation activities are disguised as empowering customers while merely being a tactic by organisations to convince product users to offer their resources, knowledge and participation. These are then turned into tools for empowering lead organisations, or the organisations that initiate co-creation activities. As they observed:

Co-creation offers an illusion of customer control that traps the consumer deeper into a desire to keep one step ahead of the firm in the innovation game. The firm is then able to colonise collective creativity of the proletariat as the consumer innovates at will, unconscious of the trap wherein she plays (Bonsu & Darmody, 2008: 365).

Bonsu & Darmody's (2008) description of the sphere of co-creation as one of *play*, which silently poaches on the vulnerabilities of customers seems to resonate with de Certeau (1984) and Hjorth's (2005) use of the term 'play', which the weak deliberately organises in the openings it creates within the imposed place. Indeed, for resource-constrained small businesses, such 'play' in the 'spaces' they create may be a key tactic to engage in games to access their customers' resources. This may then be used to accomplish goals relating to the generation of novel solutions and products while amid the numerous and complex problems their limitations induce. In Figure 3.2 below, I illustrate how co-creation is used as an activity of 'play' or 'creativity' (de Certeau, 1984). Here, I show that while the creation of new value

may be achieved from co-creation activities, my focus is on how co-creation in itself is creatively used as a tool of 'play' (Hjorth, 2005) in the processes aimed at creating new ventures.

Figure 3.2: Co-Creation as a Tool for Creative Processes



Source: Author's Drawing (Based on Co-Creation Literature)

Thus, in answer to the often-asked question of where does creativity reside (Veale, 2013), Figure 3.2. shows that it is in 'the ways in which' businesses tactically engage with their customers with the intention of creating new value. These ways, as noted above, evolve around opportunistic and sometimes manipulative tendencies that the 'weak', manifest in their bid to survive.

### 3.9 Creativity by Small Businesses: Processes of Tactically Creating ‘Spaces’ for ‘Play’

In order to suggest appropriate lenses for my study of creativity of small businesses, I summarise and compare elements that underpin the literature I have discussed so far in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Evaluating Different Perspectives for Studying Small Business’ Creativity

	Mainstream Organisational Creativity Literature	Hjorth, de Certeau	Co-creation
What is creativity	The ability to develop new and useful ideas to solve problems	‘Disturbs the reigning order and, instead, also demands a new organization’ (Hjorth, 2003: 5). Using new and useful approaches to accomplish specific goals.	Multiple actors coming together to engage in activities that lead to new value creation
Creative process	Cognitive processes that individuals and teams use to build new and useful ideas	Creating spaces for ‘play’	Engaging in various forms of co-creation
Actors	Interactions between organisation and organisational members (employees)	Entrepreneurs / Constrained Entities	Lead organisations and stakeholders (often customers)
Assumptions	Creativity happens when resources and conducive conditions are present. New and useful ideas may also be	Creativity happens in the processes for building new ventures amid limiting conditions resources	-
Authors	Amabile & Pratt (2016) Zhou & Hoever (2014)	Hjorth (2003; 2004) de Certeau (1984) Manimala (2008)	Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004) Bonsu & Darmody (2008)

Despite being largely founded on empirical evidence from contexts that are distinct from small businesses, assumptions underlying generic approaches to studying organisational creativity seem to have been applied to our learning of creativity among small businesses. This is reflected in how scholars often apply functionalist ideas underpinning mainstream research to examine small businesses' creativity. They argue for instance, that small businesses' creativity is a result of being run by creative leaders, and having small compact sizes that provide a natural habitat for work conditions necessary to support employee creative behaviour (Dhillon et al., 2009; Yew Wong & Aspinwall, 2004).

Meanwhile, as discussed in Section 3.5 and Section 3.6.3, small businesses can be severely constrained in some of the resources essential for overall business growth and performance (Banks et al., 2003). They often experience financial constraints and have a limited number of expert employees, which result in a 'liability of smallness' (Aldrich & Auster, 1986). These limitations often undermine such businesses' ability to wholly depend on their internal resources to develop the new and useful ideas they need to compete favourably. Their vulnerability to constantly changing factors in wider environments may, in addition, compound small businesses' inability to sustainably support the development of new and useful ideas by relying on themselves.

For the same reasons, that is their internal constraints and high vulnerability to external factors, small businesses are likely to approach building imaginative products using dramatically different and often creative approaches compared to larger organisations, which have been the main organisational context in empirical

studies of organisational creativity (Cokepin & Knudsen, 2012). In other words, like entrepreneurs, small businesses' creativity may be 'a function of their special circumstances' (Manimala, 2008: 117). It would appear that because of their limitations, the processes that small businesses engage in to accomplish goals will draw on creative actions and responses (Manimala, 2008). According to existing literature on innovation processes (which overlap with creative processes), one of the ways they achieve this is by reassigning their constraints to new uses. Berends et al. (2014) have usefully argued that innovation processes of small businesses are usually organised in response to their limited resources and that, it usually entails creating new uses out of the resources at hand.

In other words, a resulting strategy of their creative process lies in scouting their external environment in search for and access to resources they lack through interactions with diverse groups of networks they relate with (O'Regan & Kling, 2011). Noteboom (1994) goes as far as to suggest that such networks can support small firms to be similarly advantaged like larger firms. It is not surprising that work done by (Hewitt-Dundas, 2006) found that compared to larger organisations, small businesses have a stronger need to work with networks compared to larger organisations. In the specific context of small businesses, researchers have highlighted ways that networks and the social capital therein are directly linked with their innovativeness (Gronum et al., 2012). Here, their ability to establish essential networks, which Partanen et al. (2008) called their network mobilisation potential, is considered a key resource for successful innovation.

Thus, to learn about the nature and processes of small business creativity in my thesis, I examine their deliberate space-creation processes that support activities of 'play'. I explore the possibility that where small businesses organise and facilitate creativity processes, they may be able to create 'spaces' for novel ideas to emerge. Within such spaces, I have suggested that small businesses may advance creative ways of accomplishing their goals by taking advantage of and engaging with others who have the resources they need. In this way, my research seeks an understanding of creativity by small businesses, rather than creativity in organisations which has been the main emphasis of mainstream literature (Nisula, 2013).

### 3.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter, which formed the second part of my review of relevant background literature, was aimed at developing conceptual perspectives that could account for the distinctive characteristics of small businesses, and hence, could offer ways to explore processes that underpin their development of new and relevant outcomes. In the first part of the chapter, I gave an overview of the relationship between small businesses and creativity, paying attention to how small businesses may need to engage in creative processes to compete favourably in their markets, and how researchers have suggested that they may be at an advantage, because of their size to organise themselves to come up with new and useful ideas and solutions.

However, I went on to suggest that, in fact, the characteristics of small businesses, such as compact sizes and closeness to their markets, can also pose paradoxical dilemmas to management as they attempt to develop imaginative

products and services for their markets. They thus present a very contradictory environment, which offers a valuable empirical context to extend our understanding of organisational creativity. More precisely, their distinct characteristics seem to prompt an 'unusual' way of approaching the development of new and useful ideas that can offer valuable insights to extend current knowledge of creativity by organisations. In this sense, they appear to challenge the mainstream approach to the study of organisational creativity, which takes a functionalist approach and managerial orientation as discussed in the previous chapter.

Against this vantage background, I moved on to the second part of the chapter to propose research in entrepreneurship as valuable sources of conceptual perspectives that may help shed light on creative ways small businesses pursue opportunities to ameliorate their disadvantages. Hjorth's work in entrepreneurial studies (2004; 2005; 2007) seemed particularly useful. I argued that Hjorth's works can offer a means to further explore the ways small businesses create opportunities to build imaginative responses despite, and perhaps, because of their characteristics. Specifically, I developed a conception of creativity inspired by Hjorth (2004) who viewed entrepreneurship in terms of deliberately and creatively creating spaces for 'play and invention'. This view, I suggested, provides a means of explaining creativity by acknowledging the dynamic opportunity-creating activities that may characterise small businesses' processes towards new creations. Moving forward, I argued that because small businesses are often resource constrained, a crucial aspect of their creative processes will be in the form of co-creating with their networks, such as customers, to be able to access resources needed for meeting their needs. In this regard, I discussed work done in networks and co-creation,

paying particular attention to how 'weak' organisations (de Certeau, 1984) may be motivated to use such tactics as a tool to create opportunities for new value creation.

One point that stands out, to sum up my discussions in the two literature chapters, is the limiting effect functionalist orientations underpinning mainstream literature have on knowledge of organisations' generation of new and useful ideas. Their lines of discussion, premised on assumptions that organisational creativity is an outcome of the relationship organisational structures have on employee creative behaviour, overlook multiple ways organisations come to develop new and useful ideas.

In response to this one-sided view of organisational creativity, the marginal literature I discussed in Chapter 2 (2.7), has explored and suggested new possibilities in studying and understanding organisational creativity. One common way they have contributed to expanding our understanding of organisational creativity is by considering organisations' ability to be creative, as opposed to merely being a site for individual creative action (Fortwengel et al., 2017). I suggest that the lines of enquiry the latter have been able to introduce in organisational creativity research is a result of moving away from functionalist approaches towards more interpretive approaches that acknowledge the multiple dimensions encapsulated in organisational phenomena, such as organisational creativity (Taylor and Callahan, 2005).

I take a similar approach to this marginal but relevant literature by adopting a social constructionist perspective to the study of organisational creativity in the context of small businesses. This offers a way to question established modes of



thinking regarding how small businesses come to develop new and useful ideas. It allows me to develop fresh insights on their creative processes by considering the ways such processes unfold over time as a result of highly interdependent actions occurring within and around small businesses.

In the chapter that follows where I discuss the methods and methodologies of my research, I discuss the relevance of my social constructionist approach to the study of creativity in the context of small businesses more deeply.

## 4 METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the empirical processes and activities I undertook to deepen my understanding of the nature and processes of small businesses' creativity by studying a UK small software business, GoTravel. From the outset of my fieldwork, I acknowledged that it was impossible to tell an objective unitary story of the processes small businesses use to develop imaginative and effective ideas that may address their internal problems or those of their markets. This realisation was partly prompted by contesting explanations that appeared appealing to study the concept of creativity within GoTravel, the case organisation on which my study is built. For instance, during an internship with the business, factors such as leadership, workplace design and architecture, social activities and the nature of business activity engaged in, all appeared plausible avenues to study and analyse creativity in this business. At other times, and under different conditions, such as company growth, the presence of these factors seemed not to have any explicit links with how the processes relating to the development of original ideas unfolded.

Partly as a result of these reasons, I proceeded with my research guided by the view that creativity in real-world settings is open-ended and inherently complex (Mumford et al., 2012), a process that may not fully lend itself to articulation and direct observation. My interest during the empirical stages of my research was therefore to adopt a methodology that would help to develop just one perspective—my understanding—of creativity among small businesses (Silverman, 2013). By implication, the methodology I present here does not promise to unearth an objective

view as most studies in organisational creativity have done (Hirst et al., 2011) but instead seeks to craft one of the many possible stories about the ways small businesses build new and relevant ideas (Chilcott & Barry, 2016).

I have structured the chapter around the main objectives of my empirical exercise. First, I sought to adopt an epistemological position that would acknowledge the many voices and meanings (such as by employees, employers and product users) linked to small businesses, and together, play a significant role in constructing relevant creativity processes (Bailey et al., 2009). The social constructionist approach, which I adopted as my epistemological approach forms the focus of the second section of the chapter. My second objective was to adopt a methodology and suite of methods that allowed the specific nuances of small business behaviours to be accessed to inform and deepen my understanding of their creative processes. I achieved this by drawing on a qualitative case study methodology and qualitative methods (participant observations, interviews and company documents), which I set out in the third section of the chapter. In the final section, I show how using thematic analysis to analyse my data helped me to develop aggregate patterns or narrative headings from my data which suggested useful insights of unexpected ways small businesses may develop imaginative solutions and responses. I then show how I used these narrative headings to craft a story of creative processes by the small business I studied and draw attention to the relevance of storytelling as a suitable method for presenting my research findings.

In the next section of the chapter, I turn my attention to explaining the epistemological position that shaped my empirical study of this small business. I

follow this with a discussion of the research methodologies and methods I used for my research.

#### 4.2 Philosophical Underpinning

In this section, I explain my choice of the social constructionist approach for this research. There is considerable debate on what constitutes knowledge and how researchers should arrive at this knowledge. Two main, contrasting positions arise from these debates: the positivist and constructionist perspectives (Stead, 2004). Fundamentally, researchers from a positivist stance argue that our knowledge about phenomena is fixed and detached from subjective merits (Sale et al., 2002). Much has been suggested by scholars within constructionist paradigms that suggest that while useful, such thinking is limited in enhancing our understanding of how the social aspects of the world unfold (Bailey et al., 2009, Gioia et al., 2013). Specifically, social constructionists consider positivist thinking limiting in its ability to explore the unique and rich characteristics that underpin the phenomena that make up our research interest. They thus suggest more interpretive approaches to allow social interactions that shape organisational phenomena to be described (Chilcott & Barry, 2016).

According to social constructionist researchers, our realities of organisational phenomena, creativity in the case of my research, are in an ongoing flux, shaped and underpin by ongoing social interactions of multiple actors (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2009). To understand organisational creativity then, they seek to examine deeply how the development of original ideas, processes and products by organisations may unfold in all manner of organisations based on an understanding

of the social interactions involved in these processes. I have chosen the social constructionist approach for my research for the following reasons.

First, the social constructionist approach, due to its emphasis on the existence of multiple realities of organisational phenomena, helps to account for various ways processes necessary for giving substance and form to such phenomenon occur, and hence brings into current discussions aimed at understanding organisations alternative understandings to taken-for-granted assumptions of how organisations operate (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2009). In this way, organisational creativity research that is underpin by social constructionist assumptions allow fresh insights on how creativity happens to complement what has already been highlighted by existing research because it prioritises actors, aspects of creative processes, and places that have been previously understudied or considered peripheral (Taylor and Callahan, 2005).

Secondly, the social constructionist approach, which does not place entities, organisations in the case of my research, into natural categories based on particular features, but instead prioritises ongoing social interactions, offers ways to study how organisations of any kind are able to work towards achieving new and useful outcomes (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2011). This view is particularly useful for studying creativity in the context of GoTravel, my case organisation, because on first glance, the business appeared to be limited in the factors that are relevant for promoting employee creativity. Taking a social constructionist view however, I was able to move away from a static view of these 'limitations' to examine how they may serve a more dynamic purpose in guiding creative activities by the small business.

Thirdly, by using social constructionism, my research responds to calls to introduce more explanatory approaches to studying social phenomena in small businesses (Blackburn & Kovalainen, 2009). This is crucial to develop a deep understanding of complex social constructions embodied in their work contexts and the relationships they have with the world external to them (Blackburn & Kovalainen, 2009).

In sum, in my research to explore the nature and processes of creativity in small software businesses, I suggest and accept guidance from the social construction perspective to suggest that organisational creativity in small businesses is an on-going construction based on several interactions and relationships in and out of the workplace. Focusing on the relationships and interactions that underpin this construction helps blur the categorisation of firms as creative or not depending on certain characteristics in favour of mechanisms they adopt in response to the daily constructions of creativity (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2009).

In operationalising the discussions above for my research, I suggest by using the social constructionist stance that there are multiple and on-going realities of creativity that are daily being constructed heuristically towards an outcome which is rarely fixed or closed-ended (Hennig, 2002). Hence, creativity in my view is not just the mental faculty of a select group of people that is under the influence of conditions within work environments. Instead, it entails, or rather mostly entails, deliberate and chance constructions by actors in social interactions. As a result, the findings and conclusions I shall present from my research do not claim an objective explanation of the nature of creativity in small businesses but presents one of the plausible ways to approach our study and understanding of the subject. By implication, my findings

do not promise generalisability to a wider community of small businesses because the “reality” of small business creativity that I construct is specific to the unique social interactions of the firms I studied and at the time that I studied them.

A noteworthy point to make in finishing this section relates to how the framing of my research topic links to my social constructionist perspective. The nature and processes of creativity appears to contrast with the underpinnings of social constructionism because this ontological positioning opposes any form of existentially discoverable nature (Stead, 2004). However, I do not use ‘nature’ here in the realist sense of the word but instead as a label to describe the social constructions underlying micro-processes involved in small business approaches to crafting new and useful ideas (Taylor and Callahan, 2005).

#### 4.3 Research Design

##### 4.3.1 Qualitative Case Study Methodology

Against the background of seeking an in-depth understanding of creative processes, I found a qualitative approach most suitable (Baxter & Jack, 2008). A number of qualitative methodologies available to researchers offer a common advantage of being ‘very appropriate for studying dynamic organisational situations with interactive, socially constructed processes’ (Stuhlfaut, 2011: 7), in my case, creative processes of developing new and relevant software. Yet, there are quite significant variations in the ways different qualitative methodologies are conducted because each has a different aim and leads to different outcomes (Bryman, 2015).

Of the popular strategies to qualitative research, I chose a qualitative case-study methodology to explore the nature and processes of creativity by small businesses out of the available qualitative research strategies. Before I proceed to explain the relevance of the case-study approach to my research, I summarise the objectives of other qualitative methodologies in Table 4.1 showing show why they were not fully suited to my research purposes.

Table 4.1: Comparing Qualitative Methodologies

Methodology	Reasons not used	Elements used
<b>Ethnography</b>	<p>Ethnography is usually participant-centred research which seeks to understand a phenomenon from participants' perspectives. Here, the researcher tries to offer insights about the phenomena from the view point of those involved (Ybema &amp; Byun, 2009).</p> <p>While participants 'voices' were central to my study, I crafted a personal view of creative processes of my study site to present one of the many plausible realities that pertains to the organisation I studied.</p>	<p>However, I drew on some elements of ethnographic methods, such as spending an extended period of time in the field (Lillis, 2008). I engaged with my case study site for a period of six weeks to learn about how work is organised in the business, and to observe daily interactions. During this period, I also sought to study software development and observe how certain aspects of the organisation relevant to creativity may have been overlooked in traditional one-off interviews. Another ethnographic method I drew on was informal conversations with employees.</p>
<b>Action research</b>	<p>Action research is usually aimed at creating knowledge in order to effect change. Specifically, it seeks to transform actions or behaviours to address problems within a context (Bradbury-Huang, 2010). For this reason, research topics are usually of direct relevance to the context under study and participants work with the researcher to achieve change towards a solution of some sort (Bradbury-Huang, 2010).</p> <p>Even though my research was partly aimed at learning lessons from the ways the small business I studied organised its creative processes, my study</p>	<p>While it was not my aim to provoke change in GoTravel, most of the people who took part in my research expressed gratitude that our conversations and interviews created space for them to reflect on their daily activities. More specifically, some employees of GoTravel noted how our conversations had helped them think about creativity, which they felt was</p>



	was not explicitly aimed at directing change within the context. Thus, I did not use action research.	not sufficiently discussed in their busy work environment.
<b>Grounded theory</b>	<p>Grounded theory seeks to build theory from data. To this end, data collection is usually done with no prior engagement with existing frameworks. Theories or frameworks usually emerge after constant iterative data collection and analysis without an established prior framework (Lee et al., 2005).</p> <p>Given that there is very little research done on creativity among small businesses, grounded theory may have been useful to develop new theory on the subject. However, there is copious research on creativity in organisations in general and engaging with this literature from the start guided my research in terms of relevant areas to look at.</p>	<p>Notwithstanding, I found the principles of not allowing existing literature to cloud possibilities of creating new knowledge important. Thus, as shown in the data analysis section of this chapter, I took steps to ensure that I was not being unduly influenced by prevailing creativity literature.</p>

After assessing the aims of the various approaches available to qualitative researchers—as presented in the table above—I chose the qualitative case-study methodology. The bulk of research in organisational creativity uses surveys and data from behavioural laboratories (Zhou & Hoever, 2014). However, few researchers, including Stuhlfaut (2011) and Rosso (2014), have successfully used case study approaches. There are a number of identified strengths and weaknesses that researchers have noted in using case studies for organisational research. In the section that follows, I discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the case-study methodology, paying particular attention to how these apply to my study.

#### 4.3.1.1 Examining Strengths and Weaknesses of Case-Based Approaches

Qualitative case studies can be disadvantageous when there is the need in research to anonymise cases (Greenhalgh et al., 2005). This is because to

understand the context of the case, there is often the need to discuss detailed information that distinguishes the organisation from others (Greenhalgh et al., 2005). This is compounded when the case is a single organisation, as in the case of my research, because a detailed discussion of the case here is indispensable for understanding the topic of organisational creativity. When faced with such a scenario, researchers often go beyond usual anonymisation of the case to either change the biographic characteristics of participants, or fictionalise certain events as far as these changes do not affect the integrity of the data (Greenhalgh et al., 2005). My use of storytelling, which I discuss later in this chapter, offered ways to anonymise aspects of the case and to address this challenge that case-study approaches bring.

A common limitation cited against case-based approaches is that, empirically, findings emerging from such studies are not generalisable to other contexts (Wiklund et al., 2003). This is because cases are often deeply rooted in specific contexts and thus, may not support understanding of the phenomenon being studied when findings are applied to other contexts. Though I used a single-case, my central case seemed to share striking similarities with other small software businesses, for instance, in terms of how they are increasingly adopting agile methodologies and interacting with product users in the development of software. Thus, my findings from what may be considered a typical case (Yin, 2014) may have some relevance for exploring organisational creativity in similar-sized software businesses. Regarding the generalisability of my findings to radically different contexts, my study provides support for the relevance of a situated and context-specific approach to organisational creativity (Banks et al., 2003). In this sense, the fact that my findings

are not applicable to many contexts reiterates the need for research on organisational creativity to pay particular attention to the specific context in which research is carried out. In other words, my study of a single case offers ways to analytically generalise to other studies (Yin, 2003: 10). My aim is to show how the particularities of the context I studied, especially social interactions that are rarely replicated in other contexts, influenced how creative processes were organised. In this sense, my research is more relevant to expand current theoretical perspectives as it helps to demonstrate how the context-specificity of creativity should be highlighted in order to develop a nuanced and rich understanding (Pratt et al., 2006).

Despite the weaknesses of case-study approaches, they are popular among qualitative researchers for their usefulness in contributing to fine-grained studies that advance management knowledge. Researchers argue that qualitative case studies help to triangulate data in order to develop robust findings that describes the phenomena from different lenses. This is because, researchers can collect multiple sources of data as evidence to support learning of a single phenomenon (Baxter and Jack, 2008). Sources of data on a single phenomenon within an organisation may include interview responses from employees, written documents about organisational policies and observation of daily employee behaviour. Collecting multiple sources of data can also support researchers to highlight and report the complexities that are embedded in organisational phenomenon, such as creativity (Greenhalgh, et al., 2005). For my research, the case-study methodology offered ways to draw on a range of methods such as non-participant observations, conversations, formal interviews, press information, and data from product users of

the organisation, which I strung together to develop my perspective of creativity of the small business.

Second, qualitative case study approaches have an advantage of allowing researchers to capture and examine the processual dimensions of organisational behaviour (Chilcott & Barry, 2016, Rosso, 2014). This is because researchers are able to collect data that represents different periods of time to chart the course of how organisations and their behaviour unfold overtime. In my study of organisational creativity, I considered this advantage of qualitative case studies especially useful as I was able to collect relevant data about the business from its inception till the time of my internship. Specifically, the case-based approach offered ways to collect and connect data from different periods in GoTravel – from the time it was established till the time of my data collection. This includes, for example, data on company history which is available online and was also shared during the organisations' anniversary celebrations held during my internship, data from a previous study on 'change' in the organisation and information on company performance over the years from industry webpages.

Third, this methodology is appropriate for gaining a rich understanding of contemporary events that are bound to the context in which they occur (Yin, 2009). As noted in my literature review, recent management scholars have argued that creativity is a synergy of social processes that unfold in unique ways depending on the context in which it occurs (Banks et al., 2002; Drazin et al., 1999, Hargadon & Bechky, 2006). This means that a deep understanding of creativity will require researchers to understand and account for the context in which it occurs (Rosso,

2014). Thus, case studies, which offer a means to study phenomena within their natural context is suitable for organisational creativity researchers, like myself, who align with the view that creativity is an embedded organisational process (Bryman, 2015).

On balance, I chose a qualitative case study because it seemed to offer much promise to my research aim of a fine-grained understanding of the nature and processes of organisational creativity.

#### 4.3.2 Case Selection: GoTravel Ltd

GoTravel, the central case study of my research is a small UK, software business I have called GoTravel. It offers software solutions to clients in the accommodation industry [Fictionalised industry name to protect anonymity].

The choice of GoTravel as an empirical case was originally justified by the fact that the business' primary activity is software development, that they had been recognised within their industry for developing innovative software products, and were willing to give me just enough access for my research. However, as my research unfolded, I realised how revelatory this case proved to be regarding insightful social constructions that underlie their creative processes.

First, they had quite recently joined a host of other software development companies in moving to agile software methodologies and had fairly established processes in place to apply the principles of the Agile Alliance. For this reason, the business presented an exemplary case to study how small software businesses may

be organising processes for effective and novel outcomes after adopting agile development methods.

Secondly, I chose GoTravel to study creative processes because of interesting questions that remained after a period of interning with the firm. GoTravel presented a work environment that was quite contradictory in terms of what the bulk of organisational creativity literature assumes will support the generation of new and useful products by organisations. For instance, even though GoTravel had been recognised for contributing to innovative software in its industry, conditions in their work environment did not seem to support employee creativity in the ways existing literature suggests will be beneficial for encouraging employee creativity, and by extension, organisational creativity (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). This contrast in initial findings was a key motivation for choosing GoTravel as a context to study.

#### 4.3.3 Negotiating Access

I have included a brief account of my access negotiation process due to its centrality to certain practical decisions, such as selecting an appropriate empirical case and participants for my research (Ahrens, 2004). In addition, the receptiveness of a firm to research could be indicative of attitudes to the phenomenon under investigation and its willingness to engage with external knowledge (Ahrens & Dent, 1998), an issue of relevance to my research. I realised that GoTravel's receptiveness to my research also reflected in their openness to outside knowledge—a fact that emerged later as a key resource for their ways they engage in actions relevant for developing new and useful ideas. In what follows, I highlight key activities I undertook to gain access to my case organisation and participants.

The first step entailed negotiating access to software firms with a fundamental aim of exploring creativity in their work. I had a few friends who had prior to beginning my research promised to link me up with some software and legal firms. However, I received no positive responses from them after some weeks. I consider this was because my friends were not in management positions which would allow them to influence the decision of allowing me access to their respective organisations.

Around this time, I was honing my research to focus on creativity in the specific context of small businesses. Thus, my interest was in recruiting only small businesses engaged in software development because of an a priori perception of these firms as very creative (Glass, 2006). My strategy at this time was an extensive online search of small businesses engaged in software development in London to identify companies that could become potential research sites. I browsed firm websites to develop a quick overview of their employee size, core business function, employee profiles and artefacts. Here I was particularly interested in phrases, images and words that I felt were indicative of the value they placed on creativity. On selecting a firm, I emailed a named individual (usually a manager to facilitate my access) inviting the firm to participate in my research. Out of thirty initial emails, only one responded to say their company could not participate in the study. He gave no particular reason for this.

Next, I paid visits to the companies I had sent letters out to. Surprisingly, most of the companies were not based at the address locations they had provided on the websites. For those who were located at their addresses, the receptionists would usually explain that I needed an appointment to see whomever I had emailed. I visited a micro-business in East London where I was fortunate to meet two co-

managers who were also the only two employees of the firm. They had both finished their PhD in computer engineering and set up the firm. Though I could not work as an internee with them, which was what I was looking for at the time, due to the small size of their office (it could only fit two desks and a visitor chair) their receptiveness prompted me to consider the importance of contacting gatekeepers who had some form of higher education. I considered that barring other reasons for which organisations might not want to participate in academic research, such as inadequate time or lack of interest, if I could speak to gatekeepers who had been in higher education or done some academic research themselves then I felt they would want to help me. Reeves (2010: 316) has drawn attention to the important role gatekeepers play in helping with access negotiation describing them as having the power to 'help or hinder' the research depending on their personal views of the research and their need to seek the welfare of the people they work with.

In the following weeks, I sent out a new batch of letters by post, addressing them to named individuals in the firms whose profile indicated that they had at least a Bachelor's Degree. I followed this up with visits to the addresses. This strategy helped me gain access to GoTravel where the Head of Software Development, my initial contact person, had completed an MSc, an MBA and even a PhD which he had left midway. He explained to me that his personal problems in collecting data for his MBA made him more understanding of my requests.

The next level of access negotiation, recruiting employees for interviews in addition to the observation I was doing was not difficult in GoTravel. This is because as part of my internship I was asked to interview all employees about their perceptions of working for GoTravel and develop personal profiles based on names,



positions, and hobbies. This exercise served as a useful starting point as I could schedule all nine interviews from these one-on-one meetings. Aside from one employee who was emphatic on her unwillingness to participate, all other employees were happy to share some thoughts on my topic during the meetings even if they could not schedule a second meeting to purposely discuss my research.

After analysing the data from the first set of interviews and observations, I deemed it important to include perspectives of product users of my central case company in extending the understanding of creativity I was getting at. Two major findings prompted this which I explain in the findings section of this chapter; limitations and constraints faced by small businesses which challenge their ability to be creative and the resourcefulness of their users in contributing creative ideas. Through introductions from the Sales Manager I had access to four product users whom I collected data from through email exchanges and interviews.

As noted, I used an exploratory approach in selecting sites and individuals for data collection. This, however, has its own implications for access negotiation as data collection sites which did not appear useful in the beginning became key in later stages. For instance, I had not anticipated speaking with users of my central case when I first approached them (GoTravel) concerning my research. Thus, the agreement for the initial access they granted me was to collect data from them only within the six-week period of my internship. When it became apparent that their perspectives of their users were crucial to extend my understanding of the nature of their creativity that was emerging I went back to ask to speak with their users. I went back many times to ask to speak with one person or another on emerging questions that needed addressing and to triangulate my findings with their views (Bryman,

2015). Keeping an open-ended relationship with each contact was important for this purpose (Reeves, 2010: 316).

Though I considered that the number of people I could speak with and the cases I collected data from are a function of my own lobbying skills I also acknowledge the strong influence factors, such as gatekeepers, and inherent constraints, such as time limitations on the part of firms, have had on the extent of access I have gotten so far for my research. Especially for firms that operate in high-velocity environments (Wirtz et al., 2007), such as software development firms, there appears to be an accompanying fast-paced work environment where time is considered the most essential resource. High-velocity environments are characterised by quick changes in what is considered a competitive advantage as reflected in rapid changes in demand and technology (Wirtz et al., 2007). Making the decision to grant access for academic research in such firms does not appear an easy one. Another reason for their unwillingness to participate can be because software firms consider opening to researchers to be disadvantageous to them since knowledge practices are a competitive advantage. For example, six IT companies declined to participate in a published study because of “confidentiality and sensitivity of their business practices” (Altinay et al., 2014). Curan and Blackburn (2001) talk about three main reasons why small businesses make up one of the most difficult sectors for research. First is the fact that data on their location and activity distribution is not usually available. Secondly, owner-managers and their employees usually work under tight time pressures, making them unwilling to give time for academic research. Thirdly, there is a level of scepticism regarding the relevance of academic research and engaging in it appears a waste of time. To varying extents,

I encountered all three reasons during my process of negotiating access. To varying extents, I encountered all three reasons during my process of negotiating access

#### 4.3.4 Qualitative Data Collection: Methods and Sources

A number of factors, including my initial reading of the literature, conversations with employees, advice from my supervisors and intuition, informed my choices of sources for collecting data. As already discussed in Section 4.3.2, I chose GoTravel as my main research case because it seemed promising as an empirical site to support my objective of a deep understanding of organisational creativity. At the start of my research, I sought to collect data that would offer ways to study how GoTravel's work environment affected the development of new and useful ideas (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). This informed my decision to have an internship with the small business, where I held initial spontaneous conversations with employees on their perceptions of creativity and work at GoTravel.

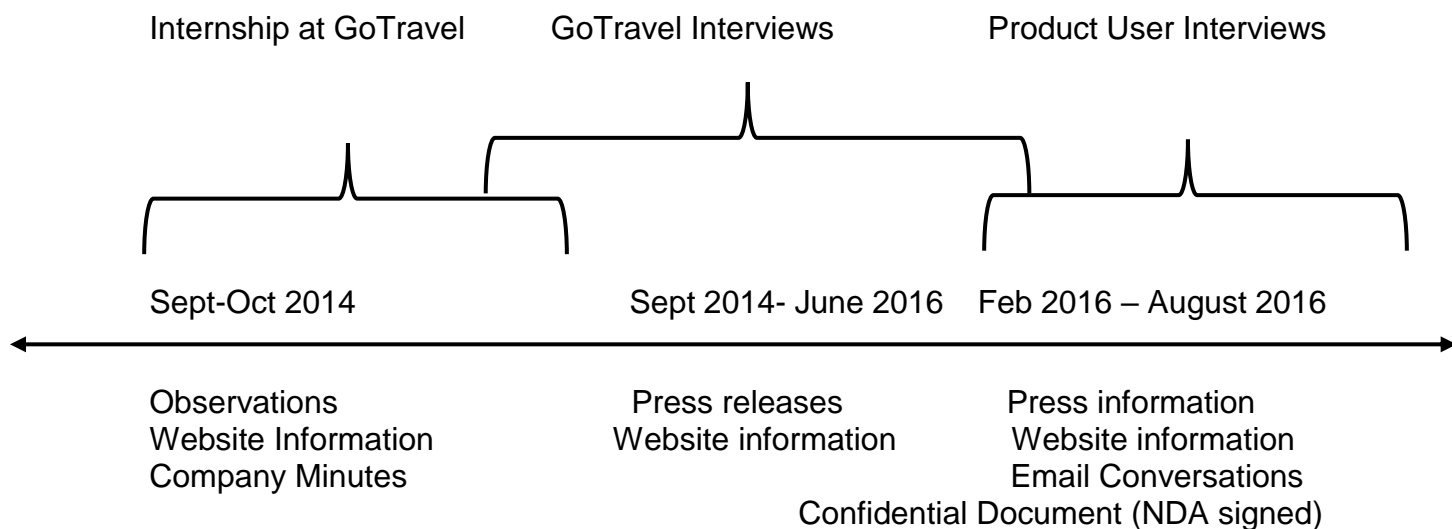
The bulk of my choices for subsequent data collection were shaped by suggestions and advice I received in these initial discussions regarding who or what embers of the organisation felt was essential to study creativity. For instance, during initial conversations, there were unanimous views that departments directly involved in software development were the most creative departments. This influenced my decision to speak with at least one employee from Development, Development Services and IT.

As data collection progressed, employees also spoke about how their interactions with product users often prompted processes for building new and useful

software. This, coupled with puzzling questions I had arrived at regarding possible alternatives that could explain how an organisation with inherent constraints managed to deliver creative solutions to product users, and guidance from my supervisors led me to pursue and collect data from GoTravel's product users, regarding their interactions with the small business. In addition to these, I chose sources to collect data based on my increasing familiarisation with the company and knowledge of where I could collect useful data from. For instance, I realised that a lot of conversations were done through email and thus, paid attention to email circulations in which I was copied. This was one especially useful in ascertaining which departments communicated with each other, and was one evidence I used to explain the clannishness between departments, discussed in Chapter 6.

At other times, my sources of data were based on intuition regarding possible places to access specific data. For example, following researchers' intuition, I browsed online to search for Go Travel's company history, past activities and industry recognition awards online. My data collection was spread across two years between September 2014 and August 2016 with significant breaks between various months to negotiate for more access (to product users) and to analyse data from initial stages. The timeline below, Figure 4.1Figure 4., shows main data collected at specific points in time (indicated above the timeline) and complementary sources of data collected in the same periods (indicated below the timeline):

Figure 4.1: Timeline of Data Collection




#### 4.3.4.1 Non-Participant Observations

I started my data collection during an internship which I secured with GoTravel in 2014 for the purpose of my research. I volunteered to undertake any duty that they needed someone to, stating in my email that I was happy to make teas if that was needed. This internship was to undertake direct observation of the nature of work and work environment in GoTravel. Internal emails were sent out to employees regarding my presence and the broad aims of my research. As a novice in software development, I considered it useful to observe how work is organised in the software development setting in order to improve my understanding of how this could have implications for the development of new and useful ideas (Petitgand, 2016). Though I undertook some administrative duties as an intern, my role was that of a non-participant observer (Silverman, 2013) as I did not participate in any activity related to software development, the main activity of GoTravel and my proxy

for creative processes. I observed the nature of interactions between developers and other departments in the software development process and observed how coding and testing were done.

For most parts of the internship period my seating space was at the reception desk which I shared with the Head of HR and Finance and the Office Administrator. There, I had the opportunity to be privy to tangible employees' routines, reporting times, passing conversations from which I inferred attitudes to work and informal relationships. I wrote daily notes (See Figure 4.2) of events and activities that I felt were significant to creativity in this small business. I also took note of office design and layout, employees seating and general office architecture. Occasionally, the observations offered the opportunity to have meaningful conversations with employees about the issue of creativity and the nature of their work. In total, I undertook 20 hours per week of observation for six weeks over the internship period totalling 120 hours. After my internship had officially ended with GoTravel I continued to visit the company for interviews with a number of employees where I had opportunities for further informal observations.

Figure 4.2: Sample Field Notes from GoTravel



Condor  
Kabin d'origine

Dim	Lun	Mar	Mer	Jeu	Ven	Sab
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Memo No. \_\_\_\_\_  
Date     /     /

## Field notes

- no recognition of new ideas from staff (eg: no recognition during staff mtg).  
There is a cycle of ~~un~~creativity in that, creativity is not a ~~deserved~~ <sup>perceived</sup> trait. Employees based on this also don't try to be creative.

no creative requirement

exposed benefit of creativity is lost

no creative behaviour

no effort by employees

→ How do its so open and non hierarchical that I could sit in one of the office spaces to conduct an interview when the manager was not around

- I find that it is easier to accept creativity in small firm processes ~~easy~~ and internally compared to the final product

#### 4.3.4.2 Interviews

I conducted two sets of semi-structured interviews (Gioia et al., 2013) for my research. The first set was with eleven employees and managers of GoTravel during and after the period of my internship (observations) with two lines of enquiry. In line with my initial attempt to explore how the work environment influenced employee creativity – which has been the most common approach to studying organisational creativity (Chilcott & Barry, 2016), I first focused my questions on the broad subject of creativity in the firm paying particular attention to how issues of nature of work, company culture and employee behaviour possibly influenced the development of new and useful ideas. This was followed by more specific questions relating to the constraints faced in their attempts to be creative, sources of their creative ideas, what the creative process involves and the extent to which the external environment shaped their creative processes. I recorded and transcribed all interviews with the eleven employees at GoTravel. The follow up interviews, which I did with five employees were to clarify data from my first set of interviews, thus I only transcribed areas that were relevant to data I had already collected. After an initial scan of the transcripts, I realised that most responses pointed to the role of GoTravel's product users (A range of travel service providers) in their creative processes. This was interesting as I had not initially given careful thought to the role of product users (or the external environment for that matter) in organisations' creative processes.

My second set of interviews was thus with four employees from client companies of GoTravel's product. The interviews here were aimed at exploring further the interactions that formed the basis of novel creative spaces outside



GoTravel's constraining environment as well as their role in GoTravel's creative processes. I collected data from representatives from the client companies who had an oversight role of GoTravel's software product and oversaw its performance in their respective companies. These representatives had been in their roles for an average of eight years. Thus, they had established some regular patterns of communications with GoTravel and were familiar with their operations. I asked product users to tell me their experiences of using GoTravel's product, their perceptions of the firm and the nature of relationship they had with the firm.

I concentrated on four participants to probe more deeply narratives of their relationship experiences with GoTravel. In line with Mallet and Wapshot (2012: 10), I considered that this number was better than collecting lots of 'fragmented accounts that risk dissociating perceived facts from their narrative context'. Table 4.2 summarises participants of the two sets of interviews.

Table 4.2: Data Collected

	<b>Department</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>No. of Interviews</b>	<b>Other sources of data</b>
<b>Bright</b>	Head of Development	Head of Development	2	Non-participant observations, Spontaneous conversations, website information and news items
<b>Felicia</b>	Head of Sales Department	Head of Sales	1	
<b>Sanda</b>	IT Personnel	Employee	1	
<b>Mark</b>	Support Personnel	Employee	1	
<b>Jeff</b>	Human Resource	Head of HR	1	
<b>Jack</b>	Executive Team	Managing Director	2	
<b>Kwaushik</b>	Development Services	Employee	4	
<b>Hans</b>	Support Team	Head of Support	2	
<b>Myke</b>	Development	Employee	2	
<b>Suprana</b>	Support	Employee	1	
<b>Enoch</b>	IT, Support and Training	Head of IT, Support and Training	1	
<b>Total number of interviews done specifically for research</b>	-	-	18 (11 employees made up 15% of Total Number of Employees)	
<b>Total number of interviews done as part of internship</b>	Across Departments	Across Levels	49 (61% of total number of employees)	
<b>Product users of GoTravel's Software Product</b>				
	Industry	Position		Email interviewing, website information and news items.
<b>Adele</b>	Leisure Accommodation	Sales Manager	2	
<b>Samuel</b>	Concierge Company (With accommodation component)	Commercial Director	1	
<b>Rick</b>	Corporate Accommodation	Head of Finance	1	
<b>Alexandria</b>	Luxury Accommodation	Applications Manager	1	
<b>Total number of interviews</b>	-	-	5	

For practical reasons, the nature of the two sets of interviews varied significantly. My initial plan at GoTravel was to conduct semi-structured interviews with employees (Cohen et al., 2013) in order to cover most of the questions I assumed could help explain the development of original ideas within the small businesses while allowing them space to share experiences not covered by the questions I had prepared (Bryman, 2013). Yet the first few interviews I conducted strictly followed the set of questions I had on paper with very little spontaneity. Retrospectively, this was because I was cautious of leaving some questions unanswered. I realised however that participants sometimes responded by speaking about apparently unrelated subjects (Bryman, 2015). To capture these unexpected responses, I took a more open approach to the interview questions in subsequent interviews and allowed employees to share their views without necessarily following the protocol. The bulk of the rest of my interviews took the form of discussions between employees and myself at GoTravel. There was free sharing of ideas between us regarding their work and the development of new and useful ideas. Because of the friendly rapport that I established with most employees it was sometimes difficult to draw the line between the research interview I subsequently had and day-to-day conversations. As I noted from my field notes after a couple of interviews:

'I laugh at the things they found funny and frown when they express dissatisfaction. At certain times, I try to suppress my natural tendency to finish their sentences – a habit of mine when in conversation with people I have a comfortable rapport. I think I might be pushing the boundaries allowed for qualitative interviewing' (Field note, 16<sup>th</sup> November, 2014).

At certain times, to ensure that employees' ideas and responses were relevant to the overall objective of understanding creativity in small businesses I exercised a level of control by introducing questions that were relevant to our discussion (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

I had my second set of interviews with four product users of GoTravel's product based on the realisation that their interactions with the firm were nascent avenues to explore the nature and process of creativity of GoTravel. Though I did not set out to hold phone interviews with product users, I resorted to it for three out of the four. One of the London-based product users opted for a phone interview while I visited the other one in person. In addition, I did not want to insist on face-to-face interviews at the onset with the Users GoTravel put me in contact with as I considered that it helped protect their anonymity and safety and increased the trust GoTravel had in me as a researcher. The other two were located outside London and the UK respectively and we agreed that a phone interview (as well as email conversations would suffice). My perception of telephone interviews before this time was as a less attractive and impersonal form of qualitative data collection compared to face-to-face interviews. However, in line with Novick (2008) I found that the three product users I spoke with on the telephone were relaxed and talked freely about their perceptions of GoTravel's product. With their consent, I tape-recorded the second and third user interviews by placing the phone on speaker. The final interview was with the representative from the concierge company and he was happy for me to visit his company so I did and we had the interview in one of their meeting rooms, which I recorded as well.

In addition to the phone interviews, I used email interviewing with product users to follow up on key questions left open from previous conversations. I used this method to elicit their comments on some information I had collected from their websites and other web pages regarding the nature of their work and contracts they had undertaken with GoTravel. Though this method of interviewing took time, I found the response of the product user who replied using this method very detailed and useful. As Morgan & Symon (2004) noted, the time-delay nature of emailing facilitates reflexivity on the part of the researcher which is an important tenet of the social constructionist approach. In this sense, giving product users' time to reflect on questions helped to endorse their co-constructive role in the research process (Morgan & Symon, 2004).

Though varied, all the interviews produced useful data that have formed the basis for developing my own understanding of the nature and process of creativity. In addition, I have found the process of interviewing and the conversations surrounding my research with employees a very fulfilling undertaking. After interviews, employees usually remarked that they had been challenged to think about their work in ways that they had not paid attention to. In fact, the Sales Manager of GoTravel asked for a complete transcription of my interview with him explaining that he had found it a useful reflexive exercise.

#### 4.3.4.3 Other Sources of Data

In addition to observations and interviews, I sourced for data from several documents and websites. The documents included company history available online, which I used to develop the company background and history of directors

presented in Chapter 5 and 6, two non-disclosure documents, which provided information on R&D activities of GoTravel and a previous study on managing change within GoTravel, I used to show a chronology of events in the organisation till 2010. While change and creative processes unfold in different ways within organisations, they have some similarities which draw on similar organisational resources (Becker & Zirpoli, 2009). Thus, the information from these sources provided a deep understanding to issues to pay attention to and how to craft my story to reflect one of the many plausible realities of GoTravel's creative processes.

The website information included press information regarding GoTravel's activities with the client companies who took part in my research and nominations for global awards.

Aside these, I had the opportunity to speak with 49 employees in total at GoTravel as part of collecting information for a staff profile photo board, which was one of my assigned tasks during my internship. During this period, I asked them to share few comments on their perceptions of GoTravel's creative processes and how they feel their work environment influenced such processes. While I did not include this information in my analysis due to how brief most of the responses were, they served as an important platform to think more carefully about how to proceed with my actual research interviews. Next, I was assigned an employee email and put on the internal mailing list. Thus, I was privy to some internal emails.

In my interviews with GoTravel and their product users, there was constant reference to the nature of different interactions that had been held between the two parties. For instance, employees of GoTravel described meetings between their

business analysts, managing director, head of sales and marketing and at times, the CEO with product users, depending on the purpose of meeting and the stage of development they were in. These were often echoed by product users. Product users also referred to meetings they had had with GoTravel – often the managing director. There was also constant reference and reflection by employees from GoTravel and product users on the Community Centre meetings. This meeting involved one product user, at a time, attending GoTravel's company meetings and sharing their experiences of using the product.

I also collected information about meetings GoTravel held with their product users from online press information. This included, for instance, information regarding deals on new functionalities that had been agreed between GoTravel, product users and third parties.

#### 4.3.5 How Data was Used

Taken together, these methods led to substantial amounts of qualitative data which formed the empirical component of my study. The interviews with GoTravel's employees' and product users served as the main source of data because it led to collecting the most focused of information on organisational creative processes (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997).

Before I move on to discuss how I analysed the data, it is worth explaining how I used the data collected. I adopted a storytelling approach to data analysis and presentation (discussed in the next section). Thus, I treated the data as raw material to craft a story that could illuminate my perspective of the nature and process of

creativity in small businesses. As Bryman (2015) notes, some narrative inquiry researchers start out with the explicit purpose of conducting a narrative enquiry and elicit stories directly from interviewees. However, research participants may not always be forthcoming with their stories even when researchers deliberately ask as Brannen (2013) demonstrates from her two interviewees. Brannen asked two people to 'tell me the story of your life'. However, while one successfully gave a storied live account, the other did not. I followed other researchers who have used narrative approaches to analyse and present qualitative data, which they collected using traditional interviewing and other qualitative data collection methods (Bryman, 2015; Chase, 2005). In this sense, the responsibility was mine to 're-story' (Creswell, 2012) the terse and fragmented 'stories' and 'narratives' (Boje et al., 2015) I collected from the field in the form of interview transcripts, observation notes and website information.

The narrative approach has been noted to offer an opportunity to storytelling researchers to craft these fragmented accounts into a coherent storyline. Thus, I treated the information here as an empirical base to explore the nature and processes of creativity by the small business I studied. I move to the next section to demonstrate how I used the data collected as raw material for crafting stories about creative processes of GoTravel.

#### 4.3.6 Data Analysis and Presentation

In this section, I explain how I organised and analysed data collected from GoTravel to facilitate my articulation of their creative processes. I analysed my data with guidance from the social constructionist point of view, which as discussed in



Section 4.5 of this chapter is the main philosophical approach I adopted for my study. Thus, my aim in analysing the empirical data collected was to uncover relevant social constructions and interactions that were, in my view, important for understanding GoTravel's processes of generating new and useful ideas (Refai et al., 2015). In addition, by adopting a social constructionist point of view, I sought to present different perspectives that informed my view of organisational creativity by privileging multiple stories that I heard and/or pieced together from 'actors' I engaged with; including product users, company websites, work environments and the small business' employees (Bailey et al., 2009, Bilton, 2010).

In operationalising my social constructionist point of view, I used a narrative approach to analyse and present my research findings. Narratives are texts (and visual images) that offer a chronological account of events and actions (Czarniawska, 2004, Weston, 2012). They have been used by a number of postmodern researchers who argue that this approach (compared to other traditional methods of abstraction) is more able to access and account for a deeper understanding of organisations (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2004). For social constructionists, narrative methods have become an even more important means of fashioning research because organisations are an embodiment of various narratives from which meanings and actions are constructed on an-ongoing basis (Ng & Cock, 2002). Moreover, narratives are (gradually) being accepted as an effective means to account for the complex social constructions embedded in the bulk of organisational phenomena and processes (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2009).

Additionally, traditional models developed about organisations, using positivist approaches, are usually not sympathetic to the nuances and peculiarities

embedded in specific contexts nor are they able to account for the narrative elements of organisations (Weick, 1995). Rather, they develop what is considered to be ‘universal truth conditions’, assumed to be equally applicable to all contexts (Richardson, 1990: 118). In my discussion of literature (Chapter 2), I showed how the bulk of creativity models have been based on such logico-scientific approaches in ways that suppress narrative forms of knowing and telling about organisational creativity. By being sensitive to the temporality of events and contexts as well as how events are connected to each other, a narrative approach to analysing and presenting findings seeks to address the concern of developing findings and subsequently understandings that do not account for the nuances within specific contexts.

As noted in the previous section, I did not start out my research to collect stories. Thus, while the empirical data collected through in-depth qualitative interviewing, observations, online and company documents, helped in generating ‘narrative data’ (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997), the onus fell on me to craft my own meta-story of GoTravel’s creative processes. The latter has been referred to as ‘analyses of narratives’ or ‘narrating organisations’ (Polkinghorne, 1995; Czarniawska, 2004) and is especially useful for developing a coherent and plausible narrative out of empirical work that has generated data from different sources. In support of this stance, Boje (2001) argued that stories are not objects lying around waiting to be collected. Instead, they are usually in the form of terse and fragmented accounts from different sources and it is the task of storytellers (researchers) to weave together such terse accounts into a coherent storyline that presents their perspective of the phenomenon they are researching.

One implication of this is that researchers and the variety of factors that shape their selectivity in the stories they craft place them in positions of 'power'. This position of 'power' has been critiqued for a number of reasons, common among them being the fact that research accounts may fall short of objective realities and be based on an 'anything goes' methodological approach (Watson, 2000). However, based on my view of creative processes as social constructions, I side with others to argue that in fact, this power places an onerous responsibility on researchers to craft stories that encourage the multiple and contested realities of the phenomena they studied to be unearthed while acknowledging that their research is merely an 'exploration of what might be possible' (Rhodes & Brown, 2005).

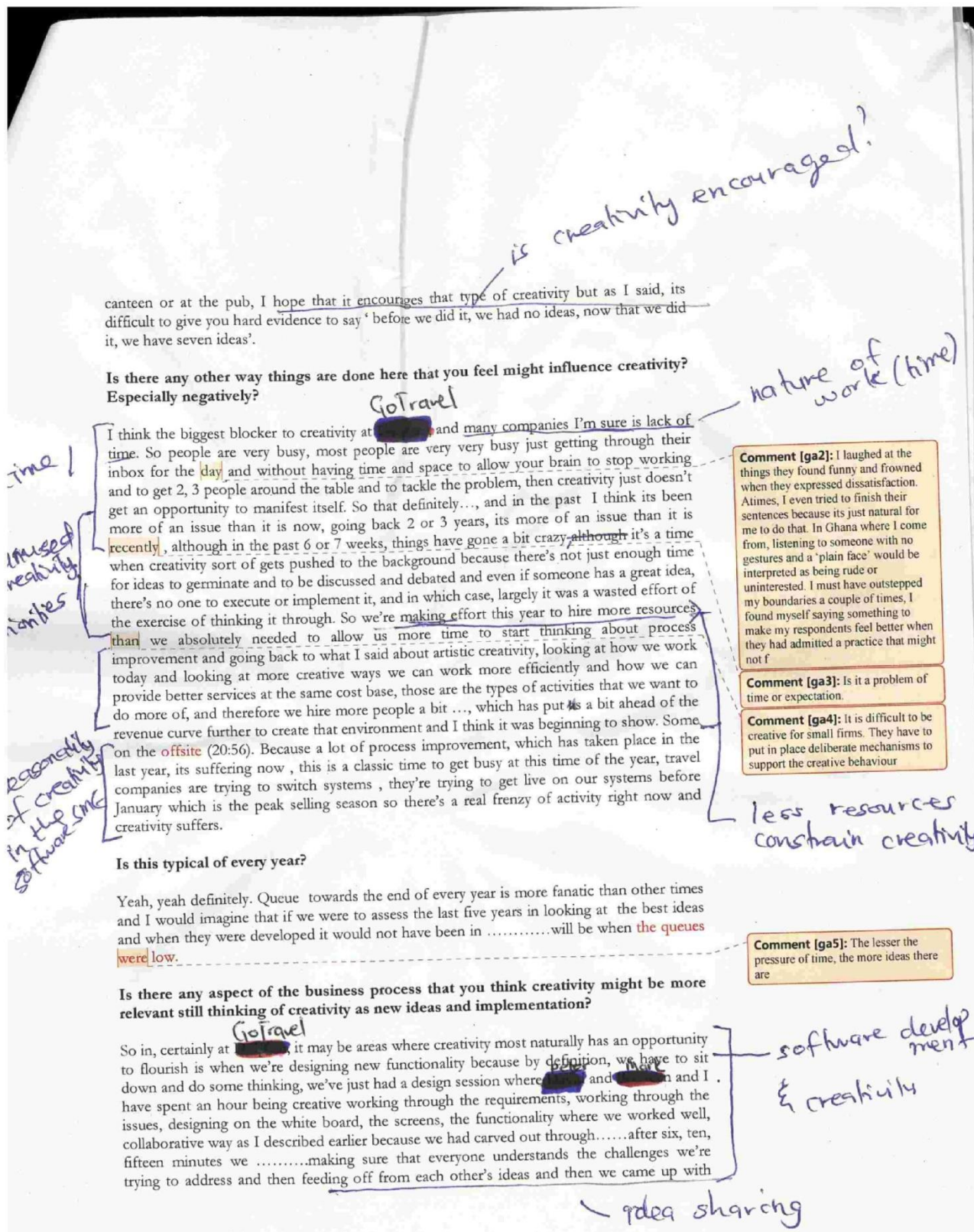
#### 4.3.7 Developing Aggregate Dimensions/Narrative Headings

Moving now to the actual data analysis, I tried using the NVivo software to help organise my data. Thus, after transcribing the first few interviews I entered the transcripts into the NVivo software and tried to develop some initial codes. For about a week I struggled to develop a desired closeness with my data and I felt isolated from the rich stories I heard from the interviews. The whole process felt very mechanistic. The codes that came up when I used the Word Frequency function on NVivo for instance were usually words, such as "that", "come", "exactly", that bore no relation to creativity. I considered that I could manually develop the key codes or themes. I tried some other functions of the software but none appeared indispensable.

I decided to go back to manually coding the data from my transcripts in order to engage better with the data collected. I did this by line-by-line and paragraph

reading of the transcripts, during which I took note of interesting themes as I progressed (Example in Figure 4. 3). Thus, for the first stage of analysis made up of data from GoTravel, I carefully listened to the audio recordings and diligently read the transcribed data to identify interesting codes when they came up (Miles et al., 2013). This activity coupled with field notes from my observations in the company was an opportunity to relive the sounds, sights and interactions I had with participants and formed the building blocks for making sense of the data I had already collected (Guest et al., 2011). I must note that this first stage of data analysis was not intended to identify what may be considered objective themes. Instead, they were aimed at selecting snippets of data that were valuable and rich (no matter how terse or fragmented) that I could use to craft my story. Thus, the themes or 'narrative headings' (Ng and Cock, 2002) that I selected were shaped and influenced by my knowledge of the firm, intuition, reading of the literature; and my original research intention to explore how those under constraints survived. Put differently, the themes were selectively chosen to reflect what I considered to be important for crafting the 'plot' of the story I had in mind (Greenhalgh et al., 2005). In this sense, the raw data or 'facts' collected from my interviews, observation notes, press releases were used for a higher purpose of being the raw material for 'plausible narratives' rather than focusing entirely on them as the focus of action (Watson, 2000).

Figure 4.3: Sample Line by line Coding



Using my first reading and re-reading of the data, I developed a number of codebooks, see

Table 4.3, to help me move from simple identification of meaningful texts to collating them in one place in order to develop more explanatory analysis of the data. There were three columns of the codebook. The first was the code label. Here, I provided a name or mnemonic to a particular set of themes. In the next column, I provided a definition of the labelled code, this entailed providing a brief description of what the label represented and which instances of text would fit under such a label (Guest et al., 2011).

**Table 4.3: Extract of Codebook for GoTravel Data**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Examples/ extracts</b>
What is creativity?	<p>This refers to how participants define the term creativity or what they perceive it to be.</p> <p>Include all responses to the direct question of what does creativity mean to you?</p>	<p>I'll describe it as <b>coming up with new ideas</b>. I'll describe it as <b>problem solving</b>. I'll describe it as work-arounds. I'll describe it as <b>free time to think get away from your day to day job</b> pretty much all those</p> <p>I think it is often about <b>getting time away from day-to-day work</b>. I think it's important. It's a bail out, when we go offsite once every four months now to talk about how we're driving the company forward, you know, we or when we have a meeting sometimes we'll will...I suggested we should do the Downs Map.</p>
Forcing creativity/nurturing creativity/creating the space	<p>Quotes that reflect how organisation strives to be creative. Include statements that reflect that 'doing creativity' by small business does not come naturally but a deliberate effort.</p>	<p>At the same time, I guess to continuously grow, that is one thing <b>we strive to do</b>, to continuously get better at what we do, that benefits from creativity,</p> <p>The management team that I work with, when we do get offsite, and we put down PDAs, we close our</p>

	Also explains how creativity is facilitated...beginning to recognise that these are not the usual explanations in literature.	laptops, we say, for the next three hours, we gonna generate ideas and build on each other's ideas, then we're able to come up with some really great stuff. <b>But we have to force it, it something that we have to build into our schedule. We deliberately have to create the space to become creative</b> We're constantly bringing in new technology as well as using technology in an innovative way as well as customers come to us with requirements that need to be met, <b>so we have to sit down and think about and dream up</b> how we're gonna develop the system to meet those requirements We're a <b>very flat organisation</b> . That is one thing that <b>we try to achieve as an organisation</b>
Difficult creativity	This refers to factors that impede the occurrence of employee creativity. Include all references to time and space constraints as well as leadership and employee autonomy limitations.	That's hard for us to do because <b>we're very busy</b> and <b>creating the environment to create the mindset to foster creativity is not easy</b> when there's lot of demand at one time and I think that's what it needs I think it's fair to say that <b>small firms like ours are less resource constrained</b> than larger firms to do these, as I said earlier, <b>there's less time and less capacity to create the space to be creative</b> and that I think it will be more prevalent in the small business
Sources of creative ideas	Include all references to where new ideas come from.	So the <b>creativity can be external. It doesn't have to be starting here at all</b> . The <b>creativity</b> especially from someone like a major company like STA travel  It wasn't like anyone was super more creative than the other person and then and all...all that was; is a <b>customer had a problem</b>

Having organised the data in my codebooks, I proceeded to follow closely guidance on doing an inductive analysis (Gioia et al., 2013) and thematic analysis techniques (Braun et al., 2014). Thematic analysis aims to highlight salient themes (or narrative headings in my case) from qualitative data that can be used to craft a narrative (Attride-Stirling, 2001). As noted by Wiles et al. (2005) who assessed the value of thematic analysis for analysing interview material, this method of analysis offers an opportunity to produce cross comparisons between various data sources. However, such methods of analysis could also lead to obscuring 'the multi-layered, contextualized interpretations of the conscious and less conscious meanings, moral ideas and values expressed and implicit' (Wiles et al., 2005: 97). Thus, in my analysis, I deliberately paid more attention to the context in which GoTravel operated, my personal observations and other sources of information that I considered important in shaping the themes that I developed but could have been hidden in any one data type I had, particularly interviews, which were the main source of data collected.

By using an inductive approach, I allowed the data (interviews, notes and memories from observation notes) to be the main source for themes that subsequently formed the basis of my exploration of creativity in small businesses. This differs from the deductive approach, which aims at analysing data through the guidance and lens of pre-determined theoretical pointers (Braun et al., 2014). Typically, an inductive approach would have required that I did not approach the data with any pre-conceived ideas due to the potential of such ideas to suppress the possibility of new themes to emerge from the data. I found this impossible to do. Aside the fact that I had already done a period of internship with the organisation



and formed an opinion on the factors that appeared most important to study the organisation's creativity, I had also read previous literature extensively before my analysis started. As a result, I had already intuitively given primacy to understanding small business' creativity by exploring common factors in mainstream literature, such as the work environment and employees with the potential to generate new ideas. To reduce the influence of this common approach to thinking about creativity (Martin, 2009; Blomberg, 2014) on my own thinking and create space to develop possible new insights from the rich stories in my transcripts, I had to deliberately take action that allowed me to accommodate new concepts, meanings and interpretations of the data.

I did two things to achieve this. First, I did what Corbin and Strauss describe as open-coding. This involved dis-aggregating the data by identifying excerpts from the transcript that appeared to qualify certain concepts. The purpose of this stage was to assign labels and phrases to units of data to signify what they mean to me (Saldaña, 2012). At this stage, I tried to silence meanings that were related to work environment by not coding excerpts related to those meanings. The second activity I carried out to identify new perspectives was asking colleagues to read a few transcripts and provide their own codes (Golafshani, 2003; Baxter & Jack, 2008). I gave my transcripts to two colleagues, one from the Department of Dance and another, a Mathematics PhD student to come up with their own codes of the transcripts. They identified a few codes which were different from the ones I had developed initially. In doing so, I was able to generate new concepts from the data, such as limitations of small businesses and paradoxes within the work environment that determine the nature of creativity. These 'new themes' provided a fresh direction

to understand the nature of small business creativity as the themes that emerged suggested the need to reflect on how small businesses 'mediate' their constraints to produce original for their product users, the relationships they develop to ensure that their constraints do not limit creative outputs, and the nature of businesses that enable those relationships.

These activities helped me look at the data in new ways that were not previously apparent. Yet, if "emergence" of themes in inductive approaches is taken to mean that the researcher has no influence at all on the themes that emerge, then I am reluctant to describe mine as such because though the two steps above helped me identify new codes from which subsequent themes were developed, I was still actively involved in determining which codes were of interest, what labels to give them and further which ones fitted certain categories. My definition of an inductive approach as used in my research is developing themes based on prompts from my transcripts, personal views, discussions with my supervisors and colleagues, and occasionally existing theory.

Based on the open codes, I developed second order concepts for both GoTravel and their product users (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997). This helped me move from simple identification of texts to more abstract interpretations of the data. To develop the second order concepts (shown below), I placed codes which had similar representations into categories and assigned labels based on what the categories represented (Gioia et al., 2013). For instance, open codes that demonstrated how GoTravel had to deliberately create opportunities to support development of new ideas were grouped under "demonstrating struggles to be creative". I followed a similar process to develop third-order concepts by categorising two or three second-

order concepts under overarching themes. I have provided an example of my data analysis in the figure below. The specific processes I undertook at each of the stages were iterative rather than linear. This means that I returned a couple of times to change code or category labels to better reflect my emerging understanding of the data.

#### 4.3.1 Analysing other Data Collected

The interview data formed the main data for the analysis presented above. However, I used my observation notes, memories from observations and company's website and press information to elaborate and triangulate the findings from the interviews from the organisations (Corley & Gioia, 2004). Thus, I did not follow a comprehensive thematic analysis of the data from observations, informal conversations, and company website information but gleaned and categorised extracts under the broad codes I had developed from the interviews. For instance, one major observation was the fast-paced work environment at GoTravel. In my analysis, I included this observation to the theme of 'constraints' that had come up in my discussion. I found my observations of overall work place structure and organisation useful in informing my understanding of the constraints employees alluded to in the interviews. Having interned in GoTravel I could empathise with the fast-paced environment in which they worked and how this might limit their ability to create time and space to support creative ideas.

I undertook member checking of my findings after initial analysis of my data with two employees from GoTravel (Gioia et al., 2013). Both employees with whom I discussed the findings provided their perspectives of the conclusions I made. Thus,

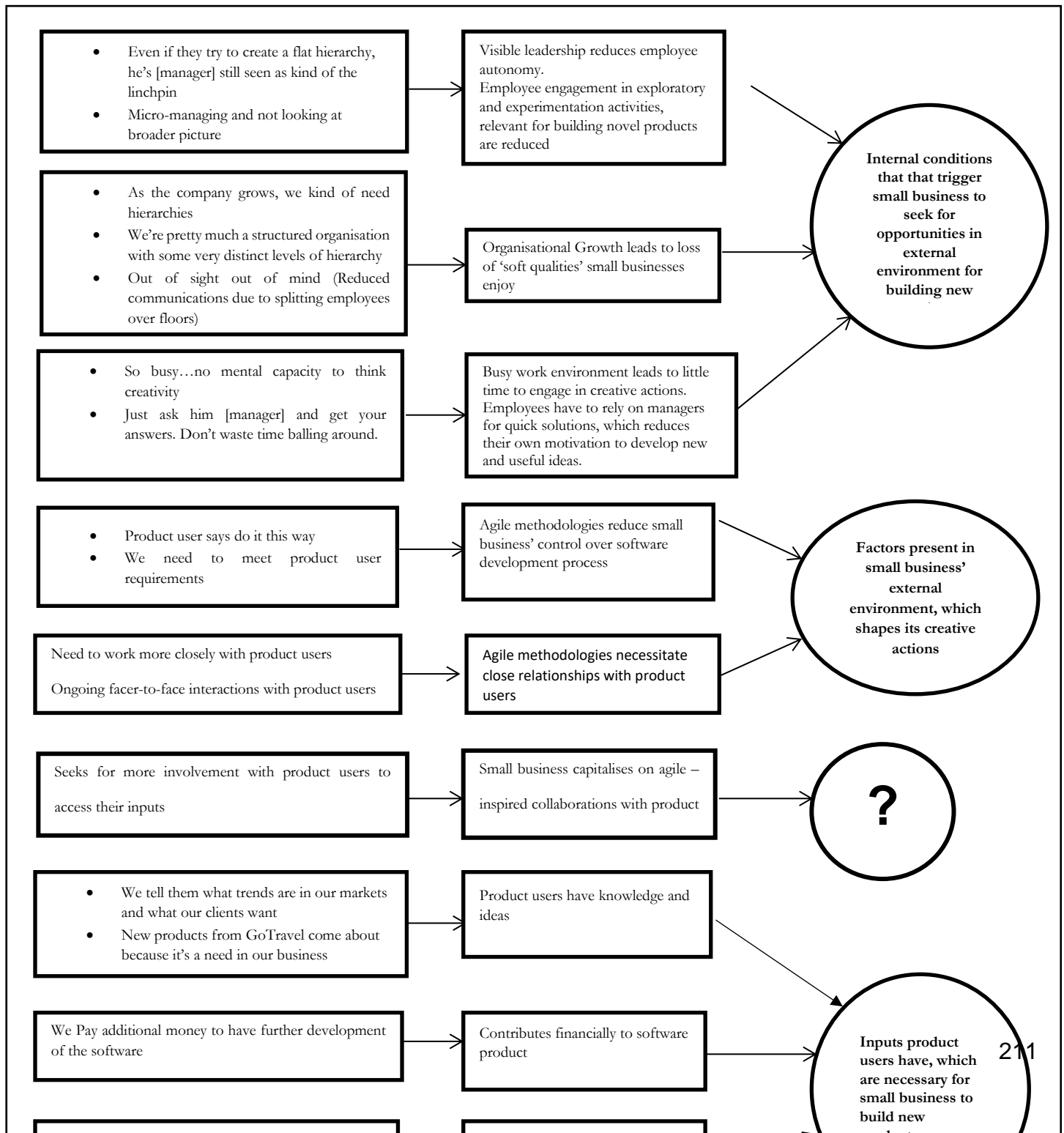
I used their feedback as part of my efforts to explore further, competing interpretations of the findings that I had developed.

Figure 4.4: Data Structure

First Order Concepts

Second Order Concepts

Aggregate Dimensions



#### 4.3.2 Explanation Building

The inductive analysis of data, demonstrated above, as noted, helped to reduce the problem of imposing preconceived ideas on the data (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). I developed three initial themes from my analysis. The first was related to the fact that GoTravel confronted problems in their internal work environment, which made it difficult to support employee engagement in activities that may have encouraged generation of new solutions for the software product. The second was that the small business operated in an industry, which on the one hand offered opportunities to collaborate with product users, but on the other, may have placed the small business in a disadvantaged position in relation to their product users. The third was that product users seemed to have the resources that the small business needed for building new products. However as shown by the question mark in Figure 4.4, it was difficult to thematise and develop the fourth main finding, which seemed to connect the three themes, just listed.

While based on intuition and my reading of the literature (e.g. Berends et al., 2014), I perceived that the processes which the small business used to shift focus from its work environment, negotiate 'threats' in the external environment, and engage with product users to access the inputs they needed, could be useful for understanding their [small business]creativity, this intuition was not sufficient to

theoretically study and shed light on the blank theme's connection with the other three themes. To explore an appropriate theme that could help fill the blank in the thematic analysis, and complete the narrative headings for my story, I engaged in a number of explanation-building techniques. Explanation-building entails 'testing' several theoretical lenses to explain and connect themes from an inductive study (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997). In other words, I sought a theoretical lens to bridge my findings from GoTravel and product users to craft my story of creative actions that characterises the processes underlying their generation of new and useful products.

To do this, I 'brainstormed' several conceptual lenses that seemed helpful in describing how each of the aggregated themes were linked (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997). For instance, based on my realisation that GoTravel's creative processes was intricately linked with product users' activities, I sought theory or research that could help understand the nature of their interactions, and which creative actions could be present. Within creativity research, I did not find lenses that sufficiently addressed the creativity evidenced in GoTravel's processes given that the bulk of research attention focuses on creative activities within internal work environments (Chapter 2). I tried borrowing from social network approaches as they account for how firms can improve their internal competencies by accessing social capital from their external networks (Gu et al., 2016, Inkpen & Tsang, 2005). While relevant, the research in this group did not precisely capture the ways GoTravel accessed the resources from product users, a line of enquiry I was interested in elaborating at this point based on a hunch that it was a creative-laden process.

During the period of ‘trying on’ a number of theoretical lenses, I attended an academic conference on small businesses and entrepreneurship where I presented my research. One of the participants suggested that I consider Hjorth’s (2004, 2005) works since he could see strong links with mine. On my return, I studied Hjorth’s articles. Despite his vested interest in entrepreneurship, Hjorth’s (2004) emphasis on how entrepreneurs/enterprises which are constrained express creativity in the ways they create ‘spaces’ for possible novelty to emerge in a ‘place’ that is constraining seemed particularly insightful to shed light on my understanding of GoTravel’s creative processes (Please see Chapter 3). Shortly after the conference and after engaging with his works and broad ideas in entrepreneurship, I emailed Daniel Hjorth with my ideas on how I intended to apply his spatial concepts of ‘place’ and ‘space’ to my research on organisational processes underlying the development of new and useful ideas. He replied saying:

Dear Gloria,

Yes, I would have applied the concepts the same way as you suggest. Space is not primarily about a physical location, a room, a topography, but about movement. Place is about physical co-ordinates; a place is stable and holds routines and subjectivities; e.g. the place of a chinch ‘stores’ certain symbolic meanings and prescribes certain behaviour and identities. A space, on the other hand is ephemeral and exists in becoming. It is emerging and perishing, kept alive by movement. What you describe, a living, dialogical relationship and interaction with users. So, note the distinction between space and place (it can be found creatively discussed in Michel de Certeau’s works, which I also draw upon).

Best-  
Daniel

(Email Response, 02/02/2017)

This email gave me confidence in the ways I was applying his (and de Certeau, whom he draws from) concepts to my study of GoTravel's creativity, and offered an opportunity to fill the gap in Figure 4.4. I elaborate on this in my discussion chapter.

#### 4.3.3 Presentation of Findings – 'Storytelling'

My next task after developing the aggregate dimensions, or narrative headings as Ng and Cock (2002) calls them, was to 're-story' the narratives analysed into a coherent framework (Creswell, 2012). As far as I am aware, Chilcott & Barry (2016) are the only authors who have used storytelling to present findings on research in creativity. I followed Greenhalgh et al.'s (2005) description of a story as a purposeful action that takes place in response to problems. Thus, I identified the core problem that GoTravel, my central actor, GoTravel was trying to solve, which was meeting product users' needs with competitive software products. I then used literary methods to create a good story that could convey emotions and paradoxes embedded in the organisation's processes for developing new and useful ideas (Greenhalgh et al., 2005). This means that my story had elements such as conflicts, aesthetic appeal and emotions. I also storied the creative processes by creating a beginning, middle and end with a sequential plot and resolution (Rhodes & Brown, 2005). This was particularly helpful in accounting for how creative processes unfolded over time, an element that is lacking in the bulk of creativity research



(Fortwengel et al., 2017). The storytelling technique I used supports a note I made in the introduction section of this chapter, that I did not aim to provide an objective account or 'tell it as it is' manner (Watson, 2000).

In telling my story of the nature and processes of creativity of GoTravel, I avoided any attempts to silence my perspectives, emotions, thoughts and interpretations which underpin the point of telling the story (Chase, 2005). Thus, in presenting my story, my readers would come across my use of verbal action to achieve a number of purposes that place me at the centre of the narration such as defending, informing, explaining and in some places confirming. These verbal actions were a way of constructing my perspective of 'reality'. For me, objective representations of why and how creative processes are carried out were subordinate to my personal account of creative processes in the story I craft in the next chapter as well as the discussions that follow.

In addition, given the extensive amount of data I gathered from interviews, observations, website information, and email conversations, I had to shape or craft the data to reflect my perspective of the ways in which GoTravel's creative process unfolded (Ng & Cock, 2002). Thus, in addition to using literary tools, I have fictionalised my story in some parts. This includes for instance changing names, creating events and scenes that offered dramatic ways to convey the experiences and emotions of the actors in my story as well as those of the storyteller, myself. Watson (2000) did similarly as he sought to protect the confidentiality of his respondents and explained that 'one could make stuff up...and still write truthfully'. My use of storytelling sits firmly with his arguments.

This brings me to a point I have already made but may need to reiterate. The data I collected from GoTravel were just one out of many raw materials for crafting my story of their creative processes. This means that my personal experiences, reading of relevant literature, conversations with other researchers and intuition were all useful materials in crafting the story I narrate in the next Chapter (Watson, 2000).

#### 4.3.3.1 Usefulness of Storytelling to Studying Organisational Creativity

Stories, particularly those which apply literary methods of drama and fiction have been used by a number of interpretive researchers not only to infuse some creativity in how empirical material is presented (Rhodes & Brown, 2005), but also to bring to life theories of organisations, which are usually told using abstract language that is not always sympathetic to the daily lived experiences of organisations and its members (Hjorth, 2007). While qualitative research has been successful at presenting rich and in-depth data to provide unique insights into subjects of study, standard forms of reporting such data have the tendency of obscuring the context specific events and their consequences embedded in them. However, presenting data using literary methods can liberate qualitative researchers from the limitations placed on them, what (Richardson, 1994: 521) called the 'constraints of science'.

For my study on the nature and processes of creativity, storytelling was particularly useful in accounting for the temporality inherent in the context and ways in which creativity happens. This means that rather than approach organisational creativity as a unitary construct that unfolds in similar ways regardless of contexts and times (George, 2007), my use of storytelling offers ways to account for factors

that shape the ways in which creativity is manifested by organisations over time (Drazin et al., 1999). In essence;

rather than viewing organizations as static, homogeneous and consistent entities, narrative approaches demonstrate the processual characteristics of organizations and can render both the paradoxes and complex causal relationships inherent in organizational change open to analysis (Rhodes & Brown, 2005: 20).

Secondly, storytelling fits well with my motive of presenting one of the many plausible narratives that pertains to organisational creativity. In this sense, my interpretation of the nature and processes of creativity by GoTravel reflects one perspective of GoTravel's 'reality' of creativity. While this recognition, that my use of storytelling does not capture any single, objective reality of organisational creativity may lend my research to critiques of validity, that is, from the possibly competing nature of stories that may be imposed on a single case, this critique is in itself useful as it supports reasons to recognise the socially constructed nature of organisational creativity (Taylor & Callahan, 2005).

Third, by using storytelling, I am able to illuminate the complexities that are embedded in organisational creativity (Amabile & Mueller, 2008). This as noted is achieved by my use of literary features such as conflicts, paradoxes, resolutions and metaphors (Greenhalgh et al, 2005).

#### 4.4 Ethical Considerations

Aside the common ethical considerations of social research relating to ensuring anonymity and seeking consent from participants (Creswell, 2012), which I prepared for by giving interviewees consent forms and providing a verbal

explanation of the research before the actual interviews, there were other unexpected ethical issues that I faced in my research. First, I had to ensure none of the participants took part in my research under duress. I was initially introduced to GoTravel's employees through internal company emails, and subsequently at one of the company meetings as a research student who was interning with the company and helping the company with some research (this was the staff engagement survey). As a result, I felt employees would feel obliged to grant me the interview even if they did not want to. Thus, during my conversations I made it clear that participating in the research was voluntary, for academic purposes and that findings would be presented in a form that would make it difficult to identify respondents (Doucet & Mauthner, 2002).

Secondly, when I was introduced to product users on my request for further data collection, my gatekeeper asked that I give him a report of the product users' responses. I understood that such reciprocity (Ritchie et al., 2013) was expected given the support GoTravel had offered in my research. However, I explained that due to the need to protect anonymity I would only be able to present a summarised report rather than individualised feedback to avoid identifying the customers. I thought that identifying any of the product users from the report might be difficult to do even with generalised reports. I did not have to tackle this dilemma for long as the product users explained that the responses they would give were not new to GoTravel as they had often expressed such views to the company through various means initiated by the company. Relatedly, I was concerned that product users would also feel obliged to have interviews with me to 'please' GoTravel. However,

during the interviews, I found that they were keen to share their impressions with me and particularly keen for me to forward their responses to GoTravel.

A third ethical dilemma I faced was with keeping a position in the company that allowed employees to share useful insights. As I was introduced as a PhD student in organisational creativity I felt that this label placed me in an authoritative position which could make employees feel I was there to monitor their activities or rate their creativity (Doucet & Mauthner, 2002). During the conversations for the employee profile I took the opportunity to present myself as a learner. I usually started by telling them I had no experience working in a software development environment and would be glad to learn how they organise their activities. Though I mentioned my research interests to them, I made sure to let them know that learning about the nature of their work was my main motivation for the internship.

My use of a single case study has its own ethical dilemmas as one case with distinct characteristics may be easily identifiable (Greenhalgh et al., 2005). To protect the confidentiality of the small business and product users at the centre of my story, I have changed names and avoided providing too much detailed characteristics that may make them easily identifiable. At certain times, I have changed the characteristics of the participants to protect anonymity (Wiles, et al., 2008).

#### 4.5 Chapter Summary

The methodology and methods I have discussed above have helped me collect rich data that has the potential to deepen the current knowledge we have of

the nature and process of creativity in small businesses. Specifically, it has helped challenge the current binary approach to studying organisational creativity which is predominantly based on examining factors that impede or facilitate creativity towards more complex questions of how small businesses are able to manifest creativity in a way that seems to offset certain constraints that beset them.

In the chapter, I have demonstrated the relevance of small software businesses to my research on the nature and processes of creativity in small businesses. I have also presented GoTravel, the central case of my research and explained why this case was most suitable. Furthermore, I have argued that the qualitative case-study methodology, grounded in social constructionist perspectives, was the most appropriate methodology for my research given its ability to provide a deep understanding of contemporary phenomena, in my case, creativity of organisations. Another important topic I have treated in the chapter is how I analysed my data using thematic methods. Finally, I have suggested the relevance of storytelling to crafting one of the multiple realities of creative processes among organisations.

In the next chapter, I move a step further in my thesis to demonstrate how storytelling offers ways to highlight essential social constructions that underlie organisational processes. I do this through a story I crafted from the data collected and the narrative headings presented in this chapter.

## 5 'RE-STORYING' A SMALL SOFTWARE BUSINESS'S CREATIVE PROCESSES

### 5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explained how I used qualitative methods and methodologies to collect various data from GoTravel, a small UK software business. I also showed how I analysed the data with the aim of developing aggregate themes or narrative headings that to a large extent captured my perspective of the creative processes that GoTravel used to improve their potential for building novel products.

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold. First, I bring together the narrative headings and their corresponding first and second order concepts – developed from my data analysis - to present my findings in the form of a story. Second, and perhaps most importantly, I use this chapter to demonstrate how my chosen methodology, storytelling, allows a deeper exploration of the practice of creativity in the context of organisations. Specifically, I show how using literary features, such as, aesthetic appeal, conflicts, atmosphere, as well as crafting a sequence of related plots with carefully selected data (Greenhalgh et al., 2005), offer an opportunity to unearth various social constructions that underlie creative processes at the level of organisations. Storytelling, I argue, brings into the research limelight, creative elements and actions underlying the processes that organisations use to develop novel and impactful solutions; elements and actions that have often been overlooked by mainstream creativity research, because they insist on more traditional methods of presenting the product of their enquiries (Chilcott & Barry, 2016).

My story, titled 'The Rise of the Phoenix', is about the 'creative' creative processes of GoTravel. In it, I describe the remarkable approach GoTravel took to create alternative opportunities for the generation of imaginative software solutions, despite being confronted with paradoxical dilemmas in providing a supportive work environment for employee creativity (that is, employees' involvement in practices that can potentially lead to new and useful ideas). This creative process, I explain in my story, was prompted by difficulties in generating useful software in-house, and consequently adapting collaborations they had with their product users into opportunities for eliciting relevant inputs for building new software products. My view is that the actions the small business engaged in (1) to move from a position of a relative paucity of essential inputs for employee creativity within their own environment, and (2) to adapt the original relationship they had with product users in an external environment that imposed restrictions on the small business' control over its software development processes to become relevant for potential development of new software solutions, more than any other single factor, reflects the organisation's creativity.

Like most stories, mine has a beginning, a middle and an end (Czarniawska, 2004) spread across five episodes in this chapter. Despite the inevitable overlapping nature of the plots, I have written each of the episodes (except the first) to distinctly reflect one of the main themes I developed from my analysis (Table 5.1). In the first episode, I set the scene by describing GoTravel in terms of leadership, business activities, and how work was organised. In the second, I highlight how some characteristics of small businesses - usually suggested as indicative of their creativity – evolved in the context of GoTravel as it grew and led to struggles in their



attempt to maintain a culture that supports employee creativity. Here, I recount issues of company growth, leadership, time pressure and difficulty of GoTravel's employees in occupying product users 'mental spaces' or fully grasping product users' needs. In the third episode, I show how some attempts (such as flat hierarchies, off-site retreats and increased platforms for social interactions) to create opportunities for employees to engage in actions that could potentially lead to inventive ideas did not sufficiently lead to expected benefits for employee creativity. The fourth episode is presented as the turning point for GoTravel. The main plot here centres on measures the small business put in place to adapt the relationship it has with its product users in order to elicit resources they needed, but lacked, for crafting new software solutions and products. Finally, in the fifth episode, I demonstrate the ways GoTravel's product users, who in my view are intricately linked to GoTravel's 'creative' creative processes, contributed to the activities of developing new and useful ideas.

Before I proceed, I provide the case details of GoTravel, background of their product users and present the main characters of the story.

#### 5.1.1 Background of Central Case Study – 'GoTravel' Company Limited

In my discussion here, I provide an overview of GoTravel's main enterprise, how the business is organised and draw special attention to factors I consider relevant in my story of their creative processes. The information here was culled from information on company history available online, non-disclosure documents on the business' R&D activities, interviews and conversations with GoTravel's employees and my observations of the nature of work, while interning with GoTravel.

GoTravel was established about twenty years ago, to develop and provide software products and services to companies in the accommodation sector. Straightforward as this may sound, their main task - development and provision of innovative and revolutionary automated sales and booking management software - is a complex one, which thrives on working with complicated permutations to continually develop new and improved technology that meets the needs of a very unpredictable accommodation market.

Having recently switched to the agile methodology of software development, the complexity of their task seems to have been compounded. They now need not only to be adaptable enough to accommodate a wide variety of client demands while simultaneously responding to complicated logic and rules stipulated by the software industry, they also need to more carefully manage relationships with their product users who have become an important part of the software development process. Additionally, the accommodation software GoTravel develops should integrate well with a wide set of systems and data structures (which are not always within their jurisdiction), and at the same time function effectively and accurately in local performance measures, such as quick and reliable response to users.

Nevertheless, GoTravel has achieved significant successes in the accommodation industry and been consecutively nominated for several highly competitive global technology awards for successful innovation in the industry. Senior management have used these accolades to represent the small business as a highly innovative business, high-performing and an excellent place to work. In official communications, GoTravel attributes its success to three main factors; its

innovation style, commitment to continuous improvement of the software and high response times, and their highly-experienced knowledge employees who understand the needs of the product users and product users' customers.

In interviews, management emphasised their use of creative techniques to address complexities inherent in their work as one of the valuable strengths the small business has developed since its establishment. They consider their success in the creative development of products and services has been particularly helped by taking advantage of their condition of smallness, encouraging flexibility in management and organising their business processes and solutions to match new problems and challenges. Thus, while the steady rise of employees from three in 1997 to 64 in 2015 has been welcome, management has been concerned that the growth and expansion is also threatening their internal ability to perpetuate company behaviours and a culture that have in the past been a cornerstone for their ability to support employee creativity. For instance, the small company, which started as a flat organisation now struggles to maintain a culture that supports such organisation.

More than 50 percent of employees in GoTravel have a background working in an accommodation or technology company with a sizeable number having previously worked for companies who use GoTravel's products. Employees, mostly 20 and 30-year-old males are divided into discreet functions, such as 'IT', 'Support services', 'Sales and Marketing' and 'Development'. In interviews, employees said they 'worked and played hard' at work and enjoyed 'the friendly atmosphere' at GoTravel. They said they had 'a fair employer' and felt GoTravel is 'a bit more personal' compared to other places they had worked at. A significant minority,

however, said the amiable social environment and perks they receive only conceal the pressure at work and complicated bureaucracies the firm is gradually developing.

In sum, a combination of these factors; GoTravel's need to meet ongoing and unprecedented product user demands, the unpredictability and complexities within their software development tasks, their need to sustain successful delivery of innovative software products and company growth make GoTravel a rich context to learn about the nature and processes of creativity in small businesses. This is because the demands from these factors, separately and in concert, engender the need for the small business to engage in creative processes that can support the generation of imaginative solutions and responses.

In Table 5.1, I give a brief background description of four of GoTravel's product users who took part in my study.

Table 5.1 Background of Product Users

Product User Company and GoTravel Liaison	Company Information	Software Demands	Basis of Transactions with GoTravel
<b>Neptune Limited</b>  Rick (Head of Finance) He was significantly involved in his company's purchase of GoTravel's software. He oversees the software's performance and leads interactions with GoTravel.	Neptune was established in 2007 to provide accommodation services to corporate organisations travelling for retreats.  The company seeks *To be ahead of changing international policies on travel. *To provide client protection while travelling due to security problems. *Work around client's budget allocations for accommodation while maintaining value for money.	*The company needs state-of-the-art software and technologies to provide interesting packages for clients. *They need proactive software that anticipates market trends. *They require imaginative software solutions *They want competitive pricing in the software to reduce cost transferred to end users.	GoTravel has provided back-office systems for invoice bookings to Neptune limited for the past 15 years
<b>TnT Company Limited</b>  Adele (Sales Manager) She manages all relationships with GoTravel and communicates with them on product performance.	TnT Company has operated for more than 30 years as a travel agency. It provides leisure accommodation and travel packages to product users who want to travel to destinations, such as Asia, West Africa, South America and Hawaii. It seeks to keep market share despite increasing competition from online offers.	*They need a suite of technologies to bring together competitive packages 1. They need a stable and reliable software system 2. They need a fast, easy and efficient software 3. They need a software that integrates with other systems. 4. They need up-to-date design and functionality	TnT Company Limited has used GoTravel's software product for booking and reservations for the past 6 years. They currently use GoTravel's reservation module to gain direct access to air and ground suppliers.
<b>Crawling Ltd</b> Alexandria (In charge of IT and software, including GoTravel's software) She was heavily involved in changes her company seeks to make towards more automated services.	Accommodation company catering to luxury customers. Undertaking a drive to improve performance. One of the key strategies towards this is to automate the bulk of their services.	*They seek an automated service to support intelligent ways of engaging with customers. *They want one that helps to improve standardisation * They want a system to improve efficiency in preparing personalised quotations for all sorts of travel itineraries.	Crawling Ltd signed up for GoTravel's integrated and sales marketing system to help streamline sales activities and optimise operational processes. Currently using only the booking system.
<b>5-Star Service Limited</b> Samuel (Project Director) He manages software and IT for working on projects.	5 Star is a large concierge company headquartered in UK. It provides concierge services to wide range of customers with a quarter of their requests dealing with accommodation and leisure.	*5 Star requires an efficient booking software that is able to manoeuvre various suppliers to get the best deal at a good value for their clients.  *They also require a reliable product.  *They require software that accommodates their ongoing need for change.	5-Star Services Limited has been in business with GoTravel for the past 6 years. They use various types of GoTravel's product, depending on which of their global branches uses it (e.g. In Denmark, it is used purely as an online platform to access information while in Zimbabwe, it is used for accommodation booking and related transactions).

As I discuss later in my story, the small business fashioned its creative processes in a way that allowed them access to product users' inputs. Hence, the final part of my story focuses on the main activities of the product users and the business needs that led to their relationship with GoTravel.

#### 5.1.2 Dramatis Personae of the Rise of the Phoenix

*Jack* joined GoTravel as Company Director and is currently a co-owner of the firm. He is considered the linchpin of GoTravel's success and a very capable director. Employees do not hesitate to contact him directly for 'help' with all aspects of developing and using the company's software.

*Fabrizio*, is the CEO of GoTravel and presently shares ownership of the small business with Jack. Though product users say they usually interact with Jack, Fabrizio is more heavily represented in media and press releases from GoTravel.

*Felicia*, was formerly an employee with one of GoTravel's product users. She currently works as the Head of Sales and Marketing at GoTravel and seems to have some good ideas on how GoTravel's processes for crafting imaginative software products and solutions can benefit from its product users.

*Rick, Alexandria, Adele and Samuel* work in different organisations that use GoTravel's software. Each of the four works in roles that require them to either use or monitor the software they receive from GoTravel. As a result, all four have close and continuous interactions with GoTravel, lasting between 2 to 24 years.

I (researcher) had an internship with GoTravel in 2014 and picked up an interest in their approach to developing software solutions (which I use as a proxy for creative processes) for their product users. Since then, I have collected data from a number of sources linked to GoTravel to understand their creative processes which I present in the form of a story titled “The Rise of the Phoenix”.

In Table 5.2 below, I present the main points I have addressed in each of the plots of my story.

Table 5.2: Summary of Story Plot

Episode	Narrative Headings	Plots
Episode One		Jack is appointed as Director of GoTravel and becomes the linchpin of the processes for developing new and useful ideas. He tries to create a conducive environment to support employee creativity within GoTravel.
Episode Two	Triggers of Creative Processes	There are complaints by GoTravel's product users about decline in the originality and proactivity of the software product they receive. This is followed by contested views by employees and managers of likely causes. Most feel it is due to GoTravel's growth and corresponding lack of opportunities to create opportunities for employees to develop creative ideas. Few employees believe that Jack is to blame as he is too involved in micro-details, and does not give employees space to engage in activities relevant for new and useful ideas.
Episode Three	Response to internal limitations	Management sets an agenda to create more opportunities for employee creativity that will not mar efforts to be efficient. This is also met with conflicting dilemmas. Questions arising include 'How do we encourage flat hierarchies and no bureaucracies, while we are growing in numbers? Do we prioritise employee creativity or employee efficiency?
Episode four	Response to internal limitations	A new Head of Sales and Marketing for GoTravel identifies not engaging with product users enough as a possible cause of reduced opportunities to create new and relevant products. She suggests the need for the small business to take advantage of relationships with product users to access resources such as new ideas, knowledge and time necessary for building such products. She leads the business to institute new ways of creating such opportunities.
Episode 5	Product users' reasons for getting involved in creative processes	Meanwhile, four product users discuss their ongoing relationship with GoTravel at an industry event. They reflect on various reasons for getting involved in GoTravel's creative processes and articulate specific ways they have contributed to improving opportunities for building competitive products.



## 5.2 The Rise of the Phoenix

The Rise of the Phoenix reflects my view of how GoTravel initially seemed to fall short of a creative organisation due to its constraints but sought creative ways to improve possibilities for developing new and improved software solutions for product users. My argument in line with research in entrepreneurship studies is that the small business exhibited substantial creativity in how it navigated a number of constraints and limitations, in order to achieve the potential for building new products. As I proceed, I provide short commentaries (in boxes) which capture certain details that illuminate parts of the story but which do not quite fit with the main story line. This includes how I developed the plots in the episodes from my data, personal reflections on the story, and some relevant literature that sheds light on relevant parts of the episodes. In the commentaries, I also draw attention to the relevance of specific literary features I have used, such as conflicts, mood, and metaphors to the story.

### 5.2.1 Synopsis

Jack, a former sales executive joins GoTravel limited as a managing director few years after the business starts. He leads the company through many successes. He is instrumental in leading and managing the creative processes essential to the development of products and services that meet changing needs of customers. As a result of his high technical competence and wealth of ideas, employees and even departmental heads usually approach him with problems in their daily tasks. But his resourcefulness in the creative processes appears to have been undermined when the small business begins to grow. He finds himself involved in minute technical

details of the business, which gives him little room to lead the processes essential for development of creative software solutions. In addition, the advantages of a small firm size (such as dynamism), which the small business may have previously relied on to support employee creative behaviour, seem to have been affected by the growth of the business. GoTravel is confronted with one of the paradoxical situations that typically affects small growing businesses - desire for growth and sustaining the 'condition of smallness' (unique features of small businesses which may be advantageous for engaging in actions that support developing new solutions). Managing this paradox turns out to be one of the most difficult issues Jack and his team must address.

Meanwhile, GoTravel's product users are dissatisfied with the software product they receive from GoTravel. Felicia, the new Sales and Marketing Head of GoTravel leads the business to engage with their product users and take advantage of their (product users') space, time and ideas to support the development of original and effective software solutions.

#### 5.2.2 Episode 1: Jack Can... There are Very Few People Who do That Link between Those Two Things.

In September 1994, Fabrizio, a London-based Italian Sales Manager started GoTravel, a software development firm to develop and provide software products and services to accommodation companies. With very little technical knowledge of software development, his plan was to appoint a company director with a strong background in software to help run the business. For reasons not made public, the

first two directors resigned within two years into their roles with the young start-up company.

Fabrizio's next move was an invitation to his old-time comrade Jack, an American, to be Director of the small business. Before his appointment at GoTravel, Jack had earned a strong name among peers in the large oil and gas software company he worked in, UrCash Adverts, as having a natural acumen for business. The sales department at UrCash especially attributed their consistently high numbers of new clients to his adeptness at selling software services to companies in the industry. They described him as being prolific at coming up with the next best idea to push up sales. In addition to his strong sales background, Jack was keen on software development and had self-taught many of the tasks involved in developing software. He credited much of his success in selling the advertising software to his amiable personality and in-depth knowledge of the workings of the company's software.

Jack soon settled in as the Director of Fabrizio's five employee start-up, closely monitoring activities to make sure deadlines and targets were met. He worked together with Fabrizio in selling and marketing 'Altitude', GoTravel's only product at the time. He led the team of three developers to improve the software so it could be easily integrated with new functionality (software functionality is a collective term for the range of uses software or parts of it offers to users). He also took up the task of training new product users on features of the software. Jack was a central figure whose resourcefulness to the small business, GoTravel, was unrivalled. Fabrizio was confident that Jack was the polymath his infant business

needed to penetrate the market without the problem of poor expertise and knowledge that usually confronts small start-up businesses. Perhaps, he could even perform similar 'magic' at GoTravel as in his previous sales position at UrCash Adverts Limited.

Jack was clearly driven to make a success of the business and believed GoTravel's small size was an advantage they could capitalise on to deliver timely but imaginative solutions to product users. Thus, one of his first distinguishable contributions was the introduction and encouragement of a dynamic no-hierarchy company structure and culture, which was different from the hierarchical and bureaucratic organisational structure that characterised organisations in the UK at the time he joined GoTravel:

'Some 20 years ago, when I came into this country (UK), hierarchies and offices and status were very fundamental to the way people thought. And that was one of things (flat hierarchies) I brought with me straightaway to GoTravel. In my previous company...I went to Kings Oil and Gas, it was all open-plan, and the CEO had a cubicle next to somebody who was drafting proposals. Although he had a loftier job title, he had the same sort of desk that everyone else had and it struck me immediately that that was a way of cutting down barriers and opening doors (Jack, M.D. GoTravel)'.

The open-plan seating Jack had seen at Kings Oil and Gas appealed to him as a way to reduce hierarchies in organisations. In general, this organisational structure and the dynamic culture it aimed to create seemed to suit the cultural objectives Jack desired for the small business including encouraging dynamism, open communication and no-tolerance for unnecessary bureaucracies. Most importantly, the flat structure helped the business to organise its activities in a way that Fabrizio and Jack felt supported employees' interactions among themselves,

and their engagement in activities that could lead to the development of novel products and solutions to customer problems. For instance, employees seemed confident to share ideas with each other and with management hoping to contribute to the overall mission of quick resolution of customer problems using creative responses.

As if in testimony to his resourcefulness, the period following Jack's appointment to GoTravel was marked with significant successes in the actual development of the software and sales of the product. Jack was constantly praised for his role in the company's success, especially for coming up with original solutions that contributed to developing a powerful software product. He was also a 'gatekeeper' for the creative ideas that were realised through the mechanisms he had set up (such as encouraging employee interactions). As a gatekeeper, Jack decided which ideas deserved further exploration and implementation. Thus, while the flat hierarchies and organic nature of the small business might have been aimed at encouraging behaviour among employees that would be useful for realising new solutions to customer problems, Jack appeared to be the main actor in this regard. By 2007, the small business had grown to 49 employees, described in retrospect by a long-term employee as GoTravel's 'blooming adolescent age' when it started to enjoy the perks that come with growth.

Jack soon became co-owner of GoTravel and continued to draw from his wealth of experience in providing quick and usually creative solutions to problems that came up. He led the company through the 2008 global financial crisis with a surprising rise in sales in 2008 and 2009. The business saw sustained increase in

the number of product users and demand for new software functionality in the period that followed. This prompted a massive recruitment drive in most pressured departments such as the Support and Development Services departments.

By 2010, GoTravel had about 50 employees (from three at start-up) and had installed its software at product user sites worldwide. They had also relocated from their one-floor office to a three-floor apartment in London to make room for their expanding employee numbers. A few concerns were shared on the need to review processes and for ways to guide employee actions which were becoming quite disorderly, but this was not taken further as other priorities relating to driving growth took more precedence. Some felt that the near-chaotic environment that characterised the organisation provided the sort of uncertain environment where heuristic exploration of new ideas and creative behaviour can thrive. Moreover, Jack was in control and that was important - perhaps more than anything else:

*'If something was to happen [to jack], that would be quite a loss to a small company like ours. We're very dependent on him. Our developers will ultimately be able to tell you, 'this is what that should do' but they don't understand why. And those two bits, he can. There's very few people who do that link between those two things' (Hans, Support Department).*

Hans' description of Jack, as the linchpin of GoTravel, was a common view held by several other employees at GoTravel. For a reasonable length of time, the ways he led the small business endorsed the expectations employees held of him.

### Commentary on Episode 1

This scene-setting episode reflects the organisational situation in most small businesses, where the nature of the business, and its performance often revolves around owners or managers (McAdam & Keogh; Shin et al., 2013). I developed the organisations' progress over the years mostly from data I retrieved from their history, available online. This included data on when the company was established and changes in leadership they had experienced. I supplemented these with notes I took at the company's anniversary celebrations during the six weeks of my internship with GoTravel. At the launch of the week-long celebrations, two employees presented a humorous animation of GoTravel's history, starting from how Fabrizio had come to the idea of setting up the company, through initial recruitments and how the idea had progressed over the years.

One of the clear observations I made during my internship was the difference in how members of the organisation approached Jack and Fabrizio. I used these observations as well as interviews with employees to describe Jack's influential role within the organisation. I realised during my internship that employees often came to Jack (who sat with the Training Team, just across where I sat, on the HR and Finance Team) to have a quick chat on one thing or the other. Fabrizio on the other hand sat in a cubicle to the left of where I sat. Initially, I thought that employees spoke to Jack more than Fabrizio because Fabrizio's seat was quite removed from the rest of the employees. However, with time, I realised that employees were either seeking guidance or approval from Jack on a particular task because they considered him to be the more technical and knowledgeable of the two, in terms of day to day tasks and long-term decisions. Indeed, Jack's broad, and yet deep knowledge of matters relating to software development as well as management came across quite clearly in the responses he gave when I had my first interview with him. As Hans from Support explained:

'He knows everything. From the logic of what we're trying to do, what things should do and you know, those kinds of questions which can cause like grey areas and "is that wrong?", "is that right?" I don't know, customer says it is, you know, that kind of scenario'.

Ella from Development contrasted Jack with Fabrizio in terms of their technical expertise in our interview:

'I mean, Fabrizio is not a technical person which is why I think I've heard some people saying that they work better with him. He's more likely to listen to your technical arguments and you're more able to implement whereas if you go to people, someone such as Jack, who though technically fantastic, will have his own ideas about the way things should be handled'.

While Ella's observation seems to imply that employees would rather not speak with Jack, my observations and information from other interviews suggest that they often did, even if it meant they could not follow up with their own ideas. These data also formed the basis for the idea in this episode as explanation for why Fabrizio invited Jack to partner the business.

I developed an intuition that most members of the organisation, including Jack had a desire to keep the soft qualities (Wiklund et al, 2003) that came with the small business from the interviews I had with Jack, and from interviews I had with employees as part of my internship task to gather their impressions of work at GoTravel. In the bulk of their responses, employees referred to certain attributes of GoTravel as a small business that they had taken advantage of as employees. For instance, employees explained that

- (1) I think working for a small company suits me better than working in a larger company because it's a bit more personal, (2) I guess that can't happen in huge companies that are driven by process and you can't wait to just get out of your cubicle. GoTravel is still a big company but it still retains that value for small (From interviews with employees for staff profile)

The GoTravel Head of Department meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2011 took longer than most Monday meetings, lasting till after lunchtime. The atmosphere for the rest of the day after the meeting was pensive as Heads of Departments shared details of the morning's discussion - declining performance of Altitude and other new functionalities - with their teams. Some product users had raised gentle but strong protests that modifications GoTravel was carrying out on the existing software were not intuitive enough and lacked the responsiveness suited to fast-moving trends in their markets. The feedback from product users was broadly linked to a paucity of innovative improvements in the existing product. Head of Sales and Marketing, Felicia, (who had joined the small business two months ago, from her CIO position for one of GoTravel's largest product users), echoed to her team the same point she had made to her colleague Heads of Departments at the morning's meeting, that the software product simply lacked the appeal needed to continue meeting the emerging demands of their market.

Just like some Heads of Departments had said during the meeting, employees said they had anticipated the decline in confidence in the products. Most pointed to the company's growth and increased demand as the main culprit. They felt that it deprived the small business of the ability to organise the work environment in ways that favoured employees' continuous engagement in activities that could lead to developing imaginative software functionality and products. They believed their organisation was under pressure to meet unprecedented demands associated with growth, and that this pressure made it difficult for managers to provide the required resources (time, finances, space away from work, autonomy) for employee creativity.



A significant minority centred their explanation specifically on Jack. These employees believed that his maximum level of competence had been challenged by the company's growth. Problems and minute details of daily tasks that were directly channelled to him were increasing and having their toll, they believed. These made it difficult for him to sit back and broadly think about the company's performance. 'I would say that every hour that Jack is looking at coding, his time is not spent thinking forward to the business matters he should be looking at (Ella, Development).

The days following that Monday meeting were marked with discussions on related issues employees felt were affecting internal processes for developing creative software products. First, employees expressed frustrations with the need to work under severe time pressure and juggle an intense workload daily. 'The organisation now needs to set more realistic deadlines for completing work - too often people seem to be working late at night to get things done' (Anonymous, Company Survey). Though GoTravel provides software services and products to a focused niche of accommodation service providers, they frequently develop functionalities to suit specific and sometimes conflicting needs of their numerous product users. Promptly addressing these requests, which has always been high on GoTravel's agenda was gradually translating into the need for employees to work under constant time pressure as sales grew. In fact, there was insufficient time and space available for activities considered to detract from 'efficient' delivery of responses and software solutions. It was not surprising that working under severe time pressure came top of the list of the one thing employees would change about their company if they had the chance (Company Survey, 2014):

I found it interesting that in addition to defining creativity as coming up with ideas to solve a problem, employees usually described it as the need to have space and time opportunities to engage in exploratory actions, such as experimenting and discussing ideas, that could help generate new ideas. Hans from support summed this up with his description of the offsite meetings the small business had started organising few months before my internship:

‘And that (off-site retreat) was creativity. You don’t use laptops, turn off PDAs whatever, phones, no distractions, pull the blinds. You know, you’re trying to get away from the world and actually that was an interesting one cos I think the support team got much more creative when they got away from the support desk for the whole afternoon’.

While the space for creativity could refer to physical space or space away from work, I reasoned from my interviews that employees also used space to refer to the latitude and scope to come up with new ideas. By this, I mean references to what may have been lack of opportunities to envisage new solutions without strict supervision, or interference, by management.

Relatedly, employees expressed worry about reduced opportunities for social and informal interactions at work. They felt that conversations that may have supported further exploration of ideas with the potential for original solutions were to a large extent crowded out of day to day business. This paucity of opportunities for social interactions was compounded by the fact that employees now worked from different floors so that people from certain departments hardly interacted with colleagues from other departments.

Employees responded to the paucity of available time and space to experiment with their ideas and to explore new possibilities by seeking quick solutions to problems from Jack:

Hans, Support: It’s just so important that the hour is not wasted, where I can waste two or three people’s time, they’re not sure, we’re all balling around or something. I tell people like ‘just ask’ [what to do]. Do you know who we need to ask...do you know who we ask?

Me (researcher): Uhm (reluctant to say who is on my mind)

Hans, Support: Well, the man here to ask is Jack

Me: Oh, the M.D.

Hans, Support: Yes, and he knows everything, from the logic of what we're trying to do to what things should do. Those kinds of questions which can cause grey areas and "is that wrong?", "is that right?" you know, that kind of scenario. He will reply within half an hour. So instead of having wasted two, three hours, and still not know what to do, it's very important and it's very efficient especially for us as small company.

Hans' approach to seeking solutions and solving problems seemed a preferred one by employees at GoTravel. Perhaps, this approach, considered efficient by many, may have unintentionally terminated experimentation processes that could have been advantageous for employees' own creative potential.

On their part, Jack and his team of managers admitted how difficult it had become to give employees latitude and space within the growing business to make their own decisions in developing the software. Such latitude, if given to employees could waste the time needed for pressing tasks:

'I think a lot of it comes down to priority unfortunately. So, can you be creative on a team that's flat out? I think that's actually hard to let creativity in and let people learn and come up with new ideas. In that case we're probably more of "let's just get on top of this... go ask those people, get your answer, get this resolved this instant". Yes, you're not gonna learn a lot from that, you're not gonna be very creative but you'll get your information'. (Enoch, Executive Team).

Enoch's explanation captures how getting work done, rather than searching for new ways of doing them, may have been a preferred approach of the small business.

The result of this was a justification for Jack to 'step in' and take most of the decisions and actions important for building new and useful ideas.

Jack's high involvement in decision making processes at the shop-floor level was not only a cause for concern in terms of overlooking certain things regarding employees' opinions, it also seemed to lead to the problem that the amount of time he had to engage in decision making and to conceive of possible new opportunities at the broad level of the organisation was reduced. Thus, at a general level, Jack's invaluable role in contributing to the small business' ability to develop imaginative products seemed to have been equally affected by the time pressure that accompanied the company's expansion.

Meanwhile, grapevine discussions that had mentioned of the need for some hierarchical structures and a review of processes became louder and more upfront. 'We should clearly define roles; we have too many overlapping roles' (Anonymous, company survey). Some heads of departments agreed to this and felt the absence of clear processes severely distracted employees from being efficient.

### **Commentary on Episode 2**

The second episode is set within GoTravel, and begins with a meeting by management. I chose this meeting as the location for deliberations on the decline of the software product to draw attention to the clannishness and hierarchies that had started manifesting in the small business since its growth. As Ella had observed in our second interview:

'[...] and also things are quite segregated, there's a Head of Department group who meet all together and we're not allowed into things like that'.

I predicted that at such meetings, important information relating to the performance of the product, which appeared to be top priority at the time of my internship was a likely topic. In crafting my story, I described GoTravel's product as declining. This description was used as an element to create initial impact through suspense and to accentuate the main problem that the small business confronted. The data I used to create this 'problem' came from two main sources. First, in my main interview with Felicia, Head of Sales and Marketing, she shared her observations regarding stiff competition the software products were facing. She also believed that the organisation similar to other small businesses, had been in-ward looking, not occupying product users' space enough (I return to this in Episode 4). At the time of our interview, Felicia had just recently joined GoTravel (2 months prior to my internship), to lead new and future relationships with GoTravel's customers. However, having previously worked with one of GoTravel's largest clients, Felicia knew the small business' products quite well, as well as how the small business operated. She explained that as part of her goals for the sales department, she was keen to gain more confidence in the product. Second, I complemented Felicia's views with data from product users who compared the current success of the software product with what they received previously. Adele for instance mentioned in our first interview that her company had realised some improvements in the product they received from GoTravel.

To sustain suspense without losing the broad aim of my story, I chose to explain GoTravel's problem in this episode in terms of the growth the company had experienced, as well as Jack's leadership. This is because, the two appeared to help explain a declining product. In addition, growth and leadership were largely shared by employees, presented a more convincing view, and are in line with literature regarding how small businesses' owner/manager manage affairs in their organisation (Durst & Runar Edvarsson, 2012; Anderson & Ullah, 2014).

From my interviews, I realised that the growth and expansion the organisation experienced had influenced a number of decisions within the organisation. For instance, they had made efforts in putting:

‘stuff in place especially like about two years ago, George, he was saying that you know, we need to look at where we are now and how if we gonna grow, what we can do so we just don’t say one day...Oh we’ve grown! So, we’re putting stuff in place now, so it makes it easier. So, as you know, for example in development, we trying to sort out some more managers to add to Bright so... yeah just getting geared up’ (Enoch, Executive Team Member).

In addition, as explained elsewhere (Chapter 4), part of my duties during my internship with GoTravel was to develop a company photo wall with employee profiles. This was to be pasted in the company’s kitchen as the expansion, and resultant split of departments across different levels had led to very little communication and familiarisation between employees of different departments. Given that literature on creativity suggests that open communication among employees is a success factor for generating new and effective solutions (McLean, 2005), I considered growth and its attendant waning communication among employees as one of the main problems that the company could be experiencing. On the other hand, leadership came across as a highly likely reason for problems that the small business could be experiencing. One common theme that came up in conversations with members of the executive team related to how they were all making efforts to move away from the minute details:

‘We’re [Managers] all taking steps to get away from the detail but we still need to think about offering solution sometimes. So, I might architect something but then I should see to doing it, you know’ (Enoch, Executive Team).

However, I focused particularly on Jack’s leadership given that he seemed to work very closely with employees in all departments. While Jack was considered a linchpin and excellent director by all standards, this seemed to have affected him in ways that caused him to resort to micro-managing most of the time in order to save time.

Taken together, the plot in this episode points to problems relating to a reduction in the ‘soft’ features, such as flat hierarchies and open communication that often characterise growth of very small businesses, (Wiklund et al., 2003).

#### 5.2.4 Episode 3: Making Effort...Spending Money

At the 2011 company's end of year meeting, management felt it was time to put in place certain measures to better guide work and work processes at GoTravel and hopefully manage the chaos confronting the development process and related activities in the firm. Few thought this could offer a stable environment with little distraction for employees as they sought to engage in exploratory activities that could lead to novel improvements on the software. One of the measures put forward was to set up an additional level of management that would support the work of the existing leadership of the company. Some leaders felt the increase in hierarchies would also reduce the traffic of questions and demands directed to Jack and empower employees in terms of thinking of new ways of developing the product. It would be good for him (Jack) and the company as he was 'keen to sort of actually row away from the kind of um, that point (micro-managing) anyway' (Felicia, Head of Sales and Marketing).

The new level of management, made up of heads of the eight departments of GoTravel, was set up as discussed. There was one head each for the Quality Assurance department, Development department, Development services department, Training department, Implementations and Business Analysts' department and Support services. They reported to the six company leaders (existing leadership), now renamed the Executive Team. This Team included the CEO, Managing Director, Head of Development, Head of Sales and Marketing, Head of IT, Training and Support and Head of HR and Finance. As expected, the newly introduced level of management was useful in terms of making working processes

and reporting lines more clearly defined and departmental functions more delineated.

Unfortunately, changes in company structure led to frustration among some employees. The advantages usually associated with a small business, which Jack and some executive members felt provided a fertile ground for employee creativity by supporting a flat hierarchy and open communication seemed to have been compromised as the company expanded. Decision making processes were not as dynamic as they previously appeared to be and employees' ideas had to go through formalised processes and countless deliberations.

Jack felt that even with the company's growth and resultant measures his colleagues were taking to ensure efficiency, there remained opportunities to maintain certain advantages that came with their compact size. This would primarily promote employee engagement and involvement but could also support the development of innovative software for product users. He believed that the additional level of hierarchy widened the communication and interaction gap between employees and management and discouraged sharing and joint exploration of ideas which could potentially revolutionise their end products. Thus, he preoccupied himself with instituting measures that would reduce the effects of the increased hierarchy on communication and ultimately on how work is organised.

First, employees of each department, irrespective of management level were organised in an open-plan seating arrangement. Jack usually sat with the training team whose table was positioned at the entrance to the first floor, opposite the reception (HR) desk. When present, Fabrizio sat at the corner of the first floor



separated from the rest of the room by a transparent glass wall. However, his room was open to be used for ad-hoc meetings when vacant, as it often was. Employees felt that the physical arrangement helped to undermine barriers that were endemic to the increasingly tall hierarchy of management within GoTravel. 'The fact that we're all sitting together, if I have an issue, I can go and talk to someone who is not my immediate boss and that's great, that's great, the flow' (Ella, Development).

Relatedly, Jack encouraged a no-door communication policy to reinforce management's extreme intolerance for barriers to communication and also to avoid creating a workplace based on 'outdated and inefficient communication channels' (Jack, M.D.). Other employees shared similar views with Jack: 'flat management structure is a great way for every team member to communicate on the same level and it most certainly works for GoTravel' (Employee, Development).

The third action to ensure open communication and to encourage bouncing-off ideas from each other entailed heavily investing in events that would provide employees (and managers) time away from work to interact. Several investments were made towards organising social events outside work to provide casual get-together opportunities for employees.

'We're spending a lot of money on collaboration, social events, company meetings, sharing information...when we moved from across the road, we spent a number of hours working at how we can make sure the third floor is talking to the first floor and things like that' (Enoch, IT and Support).

The HR department also started running offsite retreats (these retreat sessions ranged any time from a day to a week and entailed employees/managers going away to a relaxing place out of London to have extended time to deliberate on specific

issues) in response to advice by a management coach GoTravel had invited to help support business planning. At the offsite meetings, they have 'no interruptions, you just have focused time' (Enoch, IT and Support). By the end of 2014, the HR department had rolled out these retreats for the executive team and departments who were mostly affected by the pressure the organisation was going through.

Even though efforts by Jack and management had some positive results such as, increasing social interactions, their effect on employee creativity was not readily apparent. For instance, while offsite meetings helped create time away from work, it required huge financial commitment to sustain at a time when the company, as discussed at the 6<sup>th</sup> of January meeting, was concerned about a decline in sales. Once the off-site meetings were over, participants (both employees and managers) settled in quite quickly into their regular routines as the cycle of busy-ness started. Thus, whether such events had any positive effects on employee creativity was not certain.

In addition, it appeared from the conflicting strategies that management was trying to run an ambidextrous organisation by instilling order and efficiency while, at the same time, encouraging employees to engage in activities with potential for novel outcomes. The results of this, particularly, on employees' ability to develop new and useful outcomes were at best conflicting and paradoxical. On certain occasions, it appeared management was keen to provide resources, such as time, autonomy and financial resources, employees needed to explore new ideas. At other times however, GoTravel as an organisation and particularly, managers, seemed to

prioritise efficiency over equipping employees to engage in creative activities. Most times, it was difficult to decipher which one was ahead in priorities.

In essence, the jury remained out on the actual motivations for the measures put in place. For instance, given that efficiency seemed so important to this business, offsite meetings and social events may have been merely business as usual taking place outside traditional firm boundaries. Even though some employees attributed some creative ideas they had developed to having time away from work, such as during off-site retreats, questions remained on the extent to which these could be sustained and funded.

Moreover, Jack's insistence on operating as a small, flat hierarchical and dynamic company in the midst of GoTravel's expansion did not seem to resonate with employees who felt that in practice, their company was operating 'as pretty much a structured organisation with some very distinct levels of hierarchy' (Ella, Team leader, Development). In this sense, though certain company behaviours, such as open communication among employees may have been encouraged by the open-plan seating for example, there was still a feeling that the real essence of being flat, making all voices count, was not totally achievable:

'Even if we're sitting all together...it's certainly great. You can talk to somebody. But in terms of 'what does it mean to have a flat structure', I won't say there's necessarily a flat structure. Being able to have a viewpoint when you listen to all those people, that's a flat structure and I'm not sure we're there yet. And, things are quite segregated now, there's a Head of Department group who meet all together and we're not allowed into things like that' (Ella, Development).

Ella's view of the contrast between certain visible elements at GoTravel, such as 'sitting together', and the actual ways hierarchies and power were practiced such as, executives being 'quite segregated', was often shared by a number of employees who felt left out of decision making. To different extents, they felt that the measures in place to ensure a dynamic company were merely symbolic and not having any real impact in practice on providing them autonomy, or the space to participate in processes that were beneficial for generating new ideas.

A significant number of employees acknowledged how Jack's micro-management of the creative process may have accounted for the difficulties in achieving any real results for employee creativity within the organisation despite the measures put in place. However, it was not officially raised as a likely reason at any meeting. Instead, it remained a topic for grapevine discussions. This could perhaps have been because some employees acknowledged the relevance of Jack's "stepping-in" to save time. Thus, Jack remained a strict gatekeeper to the creative process while vehemently fighting against what he considered the 'ills of growth'. Felicia, Head of Sales and Marketing appeared to be the only executive team member to argue that in addition to addressing the paradoxes of managing growth and expansion, one of GoTravel's problems was Jack's centrality in work processes:

'People seem to actually go back to Jack an awful lot. When people want to talk about something, someone will say, you need to check with Jack then we can do that. So even if they try to create a flat hierarchy, he's still seen as kind of, you know, a real linchpin. I think he's sort of like keen to sort of actually like row away from that point. But then, other people are a bit glued to it really. That's one of the challenges' (Felicia, Head of Sales and Marketing).

The 'challenge' that Felicia talked about, tensions induced by efforts aimed at creating a flat hierarchy in an organisation that largely revolved around Jack's leadership, seemed to be at the centre of limitations on employees' engagement in actions necessary for crafting original software solutions. In a sense, it seemed to be intricately linked with other problems in GoTravel's work environment such as time pressure, reduced employee autonomy and lack of space to experiment with ideas.

### Commentary on Episode 3

In crafting an image of changes that occurred in response to the meeting in Episode 2, I relied on data relating to general strategies that the small business had put in place in response to the growth and expansion they experienced, given that this seemed to be the basis of most of the reasons employees gave to problems that had started surfacing within the organisation. Specifically, I used data from interviews that had referred to some of the changes that the small business had experienced. Charting the changes in management structure component was, for instance, based on a conversation I had with Sanda (I.T., GoTravel) in my second week at GoTravel. Sanda explained changes the organisation had gone through as it grew and offered to talk me through the reporting lines and management structure, which helped me to sketch an organogram for GoTravel. Even though I had observed what some of the specific roles in the organisation were during my internship, the open-plan seating structure made it difficult to know who managers or sub-managers were. According to Sanda, when the company moved to the current office, there were few changes in management structure. This included setting up a sub-managers team and renaming the existing management, the Executive Team. Based on intuition and my reading of the literature, I predicted that these additional management levels were aimed at making the organisation more efficient (Hirst et al., 2011).

To further advance the plot in this episode, which was to draw attention to conflicts and tensions the organisation experienced, I juxtaposed the main lines of discussions that emerged from my interviews with members of the executive team I spoke with and that of Jack relating to what the organisation needed. So, for instance, while most employees and managers I spoke with espoused the benefits of having an organisation that offered a conducive environment to support employee creativity, they felt that there was a need for the organisation to run efficiently. In this sense, even flat hierarchies and open communication were considered to be useful ways to 'go get answers from those who know' rather than 'waste one hour, two hours balling around (Hans Support, Enoch, I.T.)'. In contrast, I showed Jack's role here as an advocate of employee creativity. This was based on his emphasis on maintaining soft qualities (e.g. flat structure, no door policies) in the company. In both interviews I had with him, Jack emphasised these soft qualities as one of the things he wanted to maintain in the organisation, despite its growth. For instance, while a suggestion box had been placed in the staff canteen, Jack felt it was an archaic way of enhancing open communication when employees did not have the confidence to speak with their managers. Additionally, during the company's anniversary celebrations when employees were asked to dress in 50s wear, Jack was the most dressed, an act which I felt showed his enthusiasm for a fun, laid back environment within the organisation.

Yet, a number of interviews and how employees often came to him at 'his' desk seemed to suggest that the soft qualities he promoted were not really encouraging an environment that promoted employee creativity. According to some employees, these qualities seemed superficial. As Ella and Felicia observed respectively:

'A corner law is made at this flat structure we have at GoTravel. I think its flat- ish. I wouldn't say it's necessarily flat' (Ella, Development), and

'Um, I think it [flat hierarchies] has lots of benefits. It's just, I'm trying to think whether it influences the way we work. I think that from a cultural perspective, it's a really important model that it's sort of a collective responsibility because of the flat hierarchy. But it's still a very interesting dynamic. People seem to actually go back to Jack an awful lot' (Felicia, Sales and Marketing)

I developed additional support from the literature to show the contrast in what the organisation was doing with what it was actually hoping to achieve. For instance, according to Bilton (2010), most management practices that seem to be in place to support creativity are just to create impressions of an environment supportive of employee engagement in exploratory and experimentation activities. Bilton argued that 'behind the rhetoric [of promoting a conducive environment for employee creativity], it seems that the senior management are pursuing 'business as usual' (Bilton, 2010: 4).

## **RESOLUTION**

In the foregoing episodes, I have presented my view of what employee creativity within the work environment of GoTravel looks like. This view is of inherent conflicts that characterise the organisations' decisions to support employees to engage in acts that can potentially lead to creative ideas. At certain points, I write my story to reflect my apparent certainty that encouraging employees to engage in creative actions is an endeavour managers of the small business keenly prioritise. For instance, I present an image of deliberate efforts by managers to promote employee creativity being beset with a combination of constraining factors; including company growth and time pressure. At other times, the story reveals my uncertainty and questioning of the extent to which managers were indeed, willing, to provide necessary resources for employees to engage in creative activities. For instance, given that managers were concerned about efficiency of work processes, I found it difficult to ascertain whether making resources such as time and space available for exploring new ideas (as opposed to for efficient activities), was something they were enthusiastically seeking to do. Whatever it was, my understanding from the observations and other data collected suggests that to a large extent, GoTravel's work environment did not appear to provide the sort of atmosphere that could benefit employee's engagement in creative activities.

The fact that the work environment did not seem a fertile ground for employee creative actions does not suggest that new and useful ideas or being a creative organisation were irrelevant to the business. In fact, in my interviews, employees and management considered that such ideas were indispensable to thrive in their markets.

Thus, in the next part of my story, I shift attention to how this business manifested its creativity despite, and perhaps, because of the reasons highlighted in the first part of the story. I describe this part from the perspective of both GoTravel and product users. In terms of GoTravel, I describe specific steps they took to involve their product users in their ailing creative processes. As already mentioned, the most important factors that came up when GoTravel's employees and management defined creativity was difficulty in making space and time to develop new ideas. Thus, my description of GoTravel's creative processes highlights how they created avenues to leverage space, time and ideas through increased interactions with product users.



Following this, I present product users' perspectives to illuminate further how and why they are valuable and involved in GoTravel's creative processes. Together, the two perspectives provide an illustration of a gradual shift in the importance of creative processes from GoTravel's (and Jack's) internal strengths to interactions between the small business and product users.

#### 5.2.5 Episode 4: Occupying the 'Customer's Space' - Developing New and Useful Ideas

GoTravel appointed their first Head for the Sales and Marketing Department, Felicia, in August 2014. Before then, the sales and marketing role had been jointly performed by Jack and Fabrizio. Felicia had vast relevant experience in sales and IT. In addition, she knew GoTravel (and their products) pretty well, having previously worked for ABC limited, one of GoTravel's largest product users. Her work at ABC limited required her to work closely with GoTravel.

Felicia's appointment to GoTravel came at a crucial time. First of all, success in sales and marketing was high on the small business' agenda as they sought to exploit and sustain the increase in client demand that had characterised the past few years. Unfortunately, it was also a period when product users' displeasure regarding aspects of GoTravel's software products was gathering momentum. In relation to the latter issue, Felicia intuitively pointed out that to a large extent, it was a matter of too much reliance on internal capabilities for developing the software product:

'You become immersed in the environment that you are in and so you start to understand that environment and that's what you're able to talk about....and you actually start to think that's a good idea. And perhaps, you don't occupy enough of the customers' space to think about it from their perspective'.

From a sales and marketing perspective, Felicia felt the small business was too internally focused and not looking enough at external signals and customer needs in developing their products and services.

In addition, Felicia's appointment was made at a time when GoTravel was developing its software architecture and processes to fit with the agile methodology firms in the software industry were fast embracing. Going agile means that GoTravel was using more flexible techniques to develop software in iterative cycles. This contrasts with the continuous and sequential development processes of the waterfall methodology that the software industry had used till early 2000s (Chapter 1, Section 1.4.1).

Felicia believed that the agile way of developing software [through its emphasis on ongoing face-to-face interactions with product users] offered certain advantages, which GoTravel could capitalise on to develop imaginative solutions for product users, and thereby increase sales. Her main point to GoTravel in this respect was the need to be more deliberate at exploiting opportunities embodied in collaborations they had with their product users' in order to facilitate processes that could potentially lead to innovative outcomes. Felicia believed there were numerous ways product users, such as her previous company, could contribute to, in offsetting the constraints that undermined internal efforts at developing imaginative and effective software products by GoTravel.

Thus, within few months of joining the company, she had pushed for discussions on the need to think carefully about how best to create these opportunities where new ideas (for improved products and services) could be

generated together with product users. The most important step in this direction was opening opportunities where they could have ready access to product users' problems and ideas on how the product could be developed further. Such problems, as management of GoTravel had come to appreciate were essential starting points for thinking of new ideas:

'So, like we have this software, we sell this to ABC Ltd. And ABC says 'that's fine, but what if we add these two bolts to this software you've sold to us'? We say 'ok, if you're paying for them'. Long term, they're probably for the greater good of many customers. And so, the whole thing (improvement to the software) continues to grow and grow off the back of just that one idea. So, we can be led...the creativity can be external. It doesn't have to be starting here at all' (Hans, Support).

In a number of ways, most employees seemed to side with Hans' view of the influence product users had on generating new ideas and supported Felicia's actions across the organisation to tap better into clients' territories.

The department in charge of responding to product users' queries at GoTravel, the support department, was made an important department in this regard to note client's problems and requests when they contacted the small business. Two new employees were added to the department to increase their accessibility to product users. In addition, employees from various departments were trained to respond better to technical problems product users noted or to direct product users to appropriate departments. In this way, GoTravel gave product users unrestricted access to share problems they had in using the product. Jack was also accessible to product users who had problems of a more severe extent.

Aside this, Felicia sought to encourage more face-to-face interactions with product users in turning existing relationships around to be more supportive of creative processes. Thus, communication with clients were not limited to phone or email conversations, which she considered could make it 'easy to be a bit dismissive of clients...but when you meet someone, they're a person, and they actually come alive'. By 'coming alive', Felicia refers to interactions that could make the resources they required from their product users, such as time, ideas as well as space or freedom to think manifest and accessible.

Jack, Fabrizio and Felicia increased their visits to product users' work premises to assess the performance of GoTravel's software. While this practice was not entirely new, given that face-to-face interactions with product users were typical of the agile development method, the mission of these visits was broadened to encompass eliciting for ideas on possible ways to further develop the product. This was usually done by interacting with product users as well as product users' travel customers on how the product could be developed to better suit their needs. Thirdly, a selection of the company's executives held regular meetings with few customers from a single sector within the accommodation industry where there were focused discussions on company requirements. This was a way to recognise feedback on trends in the industry and check GoTravel's roadmap against these trends.

Perhaps, one of the most radical ways the small business involved product users in activities that could support the generation of new and useful ideas was through the 'Community Centre' programme they started organising. It entailed inviting a couple of product users to GoTravel's monthly meetings to share their

experiences of using a specific GoTravel software product with all employees. This platform was particularly useful to address the problem of 'not occupying the customers' space' Felicia had noted earlier. Felicia felt that it was a good way to engage the ideas of their product users and leverage their space and time to explore new possibilities of the software:

'So yesterday, at the company meeting, we had a customer. First time we had a customer coming into the company meeting and telling us what it's like to be a GoTravel customer' (Felicia, Head of Sales and Marketing).

This initiative from Felicia received support from most members of the organisation, with expectations that it could contribute to developing improved and relevant software for product users. Jack noted that:

'Actually, we've been quite creative with the one in which we've got a customer in. We talked about their booking flow and all the way they do stuff, so we might have been quite creative around that'.

True to her word, Felicia, within a short period of her role as Head of Sales and Marketing for GoTravel, had led the small business to redefine the collaborations they had with their product users [principally based on the agile methodology] into relationships that had a remarkable influence on the ways new and useful ideas were developed.

The increased access points of interactions GoTravel established to encourage deeper and ongoing relationships with product users became fertile platforms for the possible emergence of new ideas, as well as other resources the small business needed. This was either through problems product users presented or through their knowledge of the accommodation market and corresponding ideas

on how best the software could be developed to suit demands. An additional benefit of the interactions the small business had with product users was the time and autonomy product users had, which they brought into developing the product (A topic I will pursue in a moment in the final part of the story). This was crucial given that employees within GoTravel seemed to struggle to find time and autonomy to engage in activities that could lead to original ideas, to the extent of defining creativity as the (un) availability of time and space to engage in creative acts. This is in part because the product users' regular use of the software product places them at a position to identify and envisage potential needs. Thus, they need not create specialised time and space to conceive ideas for developing the product further given that these are naturally embodied in their daily use of the software and their expectations of how it should be developed.

#### **Commentary on Episode 4**

The aim of the fourth episode is to bridge events within GoTravel with their external environment (Bartone & Linton Wells, 2009). Thus, I shift focus to the Head of Sales and Marketing, Felicia as the main character in this episode because her role, which relies heavily on customer relationships is symbolic of the small business's relations with its external environment. In addition, as the main character in this episode, Felicia from the Sales and Marketing department is used as a sort of metaphor to represent the unexpected places and ways that creative processes may manifest, especially in the complex context of small businesses (Berends et al., 2014). It was interesting to note that employees had started considering Felicia as an example of creative leadership, in the ways she was leading the newly created department. Mark, for instance observed that:

'A very good example [of creativity] for me to use is Sales Department, where sales have historically not really had major change of any kind that I can imagine since I have been here. Until the last Sales Manager who's come in recently and he's really thinking out of the box' (Mark, Support).

In developing the episode, I bring together key events that I considered to be important to GoTravel around the time of my internship, two months after Felicia had been employed.

First, on separate occasions, Jack and Fabrizio had shared to the press how Felicia's recruitment into the business would help push up sales of their products. Interestingly, in my second interview with Jack, he mentioned how they had recruited a number of new employees as the pressure on the organisation was beginning to show. On her part, Felicia supported what Jack had mentioned in our interview, noting that sales of the product was declining:

As an example, I have the advantage of coming to work here and I understand what the customer likes or will buy and I think it's typical for us, a company like GoTravel, to always talk about their products and actually I am working in and out to get people [employees] to think about the customer benefit. So actually, what is it that makes a customer buy, not what you want to sell but what they want to buy and that is sort of creative (Felicia, Head of Sales and Marketing).

The third event I draw attention to, the agile method of developing software was one of the key changes that the software industry had been experiencing for a little more than a decade (Agile Alliance, 2018). I sourced for the bulk of information regarding agile ways of developing software and its implications on management practices from practitioner websites and research done in software development (Annosi et al., 2015). Their emphasis on the need for software businesses to work more closely with product users was used as a lever to support Felicia's goals of engaging more closely with product users. In addition, in my conversations with GoTravel's software architect, he explained how architecture and most other tasks related to software development were being changed to fit agile principles. This included how the software development process, which was previously undertaken as a long-haul task had started being done in short sprints, to allow for changing requirements from product users to be included in the software, as well as to be able to send finished functionalities out to customers quickly.

Ella explained that:

That's [upstairs meeting for development team members] also part of our move towards, you might have heard of agile development, which is all about better knowledge about where everyone is in their development stages, greater awareness and smaller or granular breakdown of our work tasks such that they're slightly more flexible and we can more easily adapt and direct ourselves, which is something that's come up recently' (Ella, Development).

In the episode, I focused on the positive collaborations that the agile methodology helped GoTravel to have with product users. However, my data also suggests that the shift to agile methodologies meant that GoTravel, as many other small businesses in the industry,

had less control over the functionalities that were developed. This Bright explained for instance that:

the people I look after most are mostly doing customer driven work, which is they've got a specification that's been written...signed off by the customer and they have to do it according to what the specification says. That doesn't necessarily open the doors to a great deal of creativity. It's saying 'you're gonna do it, do it like this'. It gives some slight bit of opportunity behind the scenes but not too much (Bright, Development).

Despite various problematic implications that agile methodologies of software caused the small business, I paid less attention to it in the episode in order to exaggerate the possible advantages that such methodologies offered in terms of the small businesses' internal problems. This allowed me to present the relationships with product users as something to be desired, and pursued by the small business.

In the rest of the episode, I showed various engagement platforms (Ramaswamy, 2009; Frow et al., 2015) that Felicia led to capitalise on the advantages that the agile methodologies presented. The data for these 'engagement platforms' came from my interviews with employees from GoTravel and product users, GoTravel's website data, press information, and my observations of new recruitments to the support team. For instance, in our interviews, Felicia and Jack (from GoTravel) and Adele and Samuel (Product Users) both described engagement platforms in the form of events (Frow et al, 2015) called the Community Centre program where product users attended GoTravel's company meetings and shared their experiences of using the product with them.



In the previous episode, I showed a remarkable turn in how GoTravel organised the processes relevant for possible development of new and useful ideas by describing how Felicia, Head of Sales and Marketing led the small business to take advantage of collaborations it had with its product users. Towards the end of the episode, I intimated some of the ways GoTravel, led by Felicia set up engagement platforms to engage with product users.

In this final episode, I focus entirely on telling my story of GoTravel's creative processes from the perspective of their product users. My aim here is to highlight why and how they are involved in generating new and improved software products.

The stories from product users point to two main issues which I elaborate on in my discussion chapters. The first is that product users have an informed understanding of constraints their software provider, GoTravel, faces in developing software that suits their needs. In this sense, they seem to contribute to GoTravel's goals of building novel products based on an awareness of the importance of their role in relevant processes. The second is the ways in which they are involved in their software providers' creative process either through paying for new developments to be included, providing their 'space and time' to think of original ways of developing the product, and contributing to the development of the software based on the knowledge they have of their markets.

A final point to make before I proceed is that while the specific content of my story from product user perspectives may raise a range of issues relevant to business management in general, my purpose in presenting them is solely to illustrate, what in my view are issues relevant to GoTravel's creative processes.

#### 5.2.6 Episode 5: Accessing Support from Product Users

At the Annual Digital Exchange event held in Paris in late November 2014, four of GoTravel's product users met after the days' session to catch up as usual.

Adele and Rick had first met in 2010 and made it a point to contact each other when similar events came up. In the years that followed, they met Alexandria and Rick at similar events relevant to their industry. Realising that they all used an aspect of GoTravel's software product in their companies, they became close acquaintances, regularly attending relevant industry events together.

The last workshop Rick had attended for this event was before lunchtime. It had been a discussion on how companies like theirs could play a role in building effective digital products for their customers. He shared his thoughts on the issues that came up with the rest. Soon, the four shifted to a topic they usually talked about at their meetings: their respective company's experiences of GoTravel's software products. In previous chats, they had shared with one another their perceptions of the software their companies commonly used from GoTravel. Usually, they would tell each other how their expectations of what the software product should deliver, particularly those relating to an attractive design, efficient functionality and proactive features, were not being met.

In one meeting for instance, Rick had described his company's use of the software to his friends as 'an up and down journey. You initially use GoTravel [software], you basically get what is there and you try to work around it'. With what may have been a hint of distress in her voice, Adele echoed Rick's views at that meeting. The travel agent company she worked for needed their software provider to 'anticipate trends in their market and develop existing software to meet those needs'. However, after years of transacting with the small business, she felt

GoTravel was not fully anticipating their needs. For her, the most worrying factor was the 'look and feel' of the software design:

'It is understood that we expect any IT provider to be relating to trends and needs in the market, being pro-active, not only with the functionality, but equally with design and usability. Today's customers do not just expect a website or booking tool to work. They also expect it to look great, and to be interactive and responsive. The basic GoTravel product is a bit old-fashioned and too factual and plain' (Adele, TnT Ltd).

Alexandria, whose company was relatively new to GoTravel seemed a bit uncertain about the deliverable of the software when such discussions came up. Her narratives on her company's views of the software product moved back and forth. At one time, she shared in an excited tone, 'In a lot of respects, GoTravel works brilliantly. It does give us what we need'. In a subsequent chat, she seemed to shift camp. 'There are a lot of areas that do not work for us, and there are a lot of areas that we have to do development on'.

As if on further reflection, she continued:

'We've had lots of discussions with GoTravel that maybe we were misled at the time of sale regarding what we were getting when we were buying the product. Most of the systems that we require weren't included in the product itself'.

At the time of purchase, Crawling Limited, Alexandria's company had planned to use GoTravel's product to offer high end booking and clientele services to their leisure customers. However, after a year of signing the contract, they could only use it as a quote system because it was not yet a good fit for their bespoke needs. They awaited further developments from GoTravel for it to serve the purpose for which it was bought.

Numerous everyday examples suggest that most product users with similar experiences as these four would switch to other providers. Yet, whenever that option had come up in their previous meetings, none of the four had shown any signs that their companies were considering an alternative software provider. Rick said:

‘Are there better products out there? Yes, there are. Why am I not going to them, well because maybe they’re too costly and to start reinventing the wheel again- it can be more trouble’s worth so you try to work with the vendor [GoTravel] that hopefully understands what you need and hopefully they can deliver what you need doing’ (Rick, Neptune Ltd).

For Rick, starting again with a new software provider would mean building a new relationship with another company whose relative merits they could not be sure of. It could also require huge initial investments to get the basic product to a standard his company could use. Perhaps, it was a better they stayed with GoTravel.

There were other reasons that made product users reluctant to leave. For instance, in Alexandria’s case, it appeared to be a matter of trust in the future of what GoTravel could deliver. She assured the rest of the group about how the current products from GoTravel would outperform offerings in the future if ongoing developments such as the ones her company had just requested and received from GoTravel continued. There was very little point in starting over with rival software providers when there appeared to be opportunities to make the product better in the very near future:

Moving forward into the future, I can see it working exactly as we want it to. But at the moment, because of the development work and the enhancements that we need to do, we can’t use it as a full booking engine’.

Moreover, for some time now, product user companies including the ones the four worked for had been working closely with developers and business analysts at GoTravel. According to Samuel, Jack and some guys from the development team at GoTravel had told his company about how firms in the software development industry were adopting a more efficient way of developing software. Agile methodology it was called. This methodology required product users such as his company to collaborate more closely with the small business in each sprint (development cycles of about 4 weeks at a time) of developing software. In this sense, his company had been more closely engaged in the development task by providing ongoing information on their changing requirements and needs to the developers. For this reason, they had begun to feel more attached to the small business. It felt as if they were equally responsible for the development process.

Adele shared with the rest of the group how in the past two years, her company had noticed changes in GoTravel's response to their needs that had influenced them to rescind their earlier decisions on leaving. TnT company, was particularly happy about the fact that GoTravel had integrated new programmes such as the 'manage my itinerary online' into the basic product they received years ago. She was elated with the 'Community Centre' programme where a representative from her company had been invited to share TnT and their customers' experiences of using the software product with GoTravel's employees at their monthly meetings in London. But for these, Adele told the others, her company 'would have long left GoTravel'.

In their past chats, Samuel had spoken of 5-Star Service Ltd's concerns with multiple and frequent bugs in the software which affected reliability. However, at this meeting, he also praised certain elements of the software they were now receiving. 'The database is structured and the booking tool for online is strong', he said. And even though there were still a few issues with bugs, he admitted that 'any piece of software will have a bug in it somehow. There's no such thing as perfect software, we've discovered' (Samuel, 5 Star Limited).

On the whole, future expectations on what GoTravel's product could deliver, reluctance to start building a relationship with new providers and some positive experiences seemed to influence product users' decisions to stick with GoTravel. On their part, these factors appeared to have provided GoTravel with opportunities to organise processes that supported incorporating new features and functionality into existing products. In other words, the fact that product users stayed with them gave GoTravel time to seek ways of developing better products.

With each step of GoTravel and their product users getting closer to one another, whether because of collaborations made possible by the agile way of developing software or the fact that product users did not consider switching from GoTravel to other providers, came a growing awareness by the four and perhaps, other companies, of how constrained the business that provided them with software solutions could be in meeting their needs:

'I believe GoTravel (and their booking/reservation module) is facing some major challenges. If they want to maintain their current client portfolio as well as attract new product users, they need to check these' (Adele).

For reasons such as this, it was quite clear among product users that the responsibility of developing imaginative software solutions could not be left to GoTravel. Perhaps, it was necessary they, as product users who knew the accommodation market well, respond to calls by the small business to not only give feedback on specific cycles of developing software (as required by the agile method), but also engage more closely in the processes and activities necessary to develop original and proactive solutions their customers needed. After all, they reasoned, it will be good for their competitiveness in the long run.

Thus, on this cold November day in Paris, their conversations on perceptions of GoTravel's software product and relationships they had with the small business were somewhat different from usual complaints. The four shared their experiences of how they had begun to yield to GoTravel's call for support. For instance, at the 'Community Centre' meetings, Adele explained that she had suggested ways the product could be better developed. Samuel explained that in quarterly meetings they had with Jack and his team from GoTravel, he [Samuel] would 'talk about our customers and what they want and what they do. What we think we need for our customers' as he hoped, this would provide some fresh ideas to GoTravel in imaginatively building their products to suit end users' needs.

The four also said aside communicating with their account manager (from GoTravel), Felicia, Fabrizio and Jack had, in recent times, visited them to check the performance of the software and invited them to make suggestions on novel ways of crafting relevant and new functionality. Based on their knowledge of the market and their own customer needs, they would sometimes make requests for the product

to be more appropriately suited to emerging needs. While they recognised the important role that they seemed to be playing in such processes to build a creative and competitive product, product users did not appear totally pleased. In a tone, which seemed to depict resignation, Rick noted how:

You have to nurture the creativity with GoTravel. I come up with the idea and then I say to GoTravel, ok, is this possible? Yes, it is possible, obviously at a cost. I feel that sometimes, the creativity comes about because it's a need we spot in our business. So yeah, that is more driven by us, it is more by us (Rick, Neptune).

Rick's narrative highlights how regular interactions between his company and GoTravel on what is possible with the software was product users' way of supporting processes relevant for improving the product. An example of such 'nurturing' was also the suggestion for 'online manuals or FAQ' Adele made. 'This we have not yet seen from GoTravel' she noted to her friends. In fact, for Adele, GoTravel is a 'Development House' - a place where product users constantly request new features and functionalities - rather than a place where creative exploration of possible ways to improve the software is initiated.

At other times, product users' engagement in processes of building software products went beyond suggesting ideas. Product users had to 'sponsor' (pay for) ideas they had raised or requests they had made. This was especially so when they presented problems which required new features or functionality. There was relatively lesser enthusiasm with this way of supporting their software providers' activities towards the potential development of impactful and original software solutions.



For Rick, maybe GoTravel was capable of developing the ideas his company needed. But maybe, 'GoTravel does not always come forward with ideas because obviously if they did, it's a cost to them'. While his company did not show signs of switching to a different software supplier, Rick did not hide his frustrations with the ways they had had to contribute financially:

[...] where we've been more involved with GoTravel more so in the last couple of years, we've actually had to pay them additional money to make the software do what we want it to do. But it's been a very long process with GoTravel, I suppose we've been building in the last two to three years with GoTravel to improve their system more so at the expense of us'.

'The standard GoTravel package, to get it to the stage that we can use it effectively and efficiently, yes, it has cost a lot of effort and monies on our part', Alexandria added.

Samuel seemed a bit more understanding of GoTravel's inability to respond to their demands. He tried to draw the other three's attention to the fact that like many small businesses who desire to provide value for their customers, GoTravel is 'a lean company in terms of resources' so:

'It's not that they're unwilling to do it [initiate changes in the product] but when they look at their number of resources, if I really want to go in and get something new built, it will have to take its turn you know, in the line of customer requirements in there. So, I can understand why it works like that' (Samuel, 5-Star Ltd).

Samuel's sentiments are similar to Jack's explanation of how scarce resources led to limited opportunities for GoTravel to internally support employee creativity. Furthermore, he explained to his friends how GoTravel's attitude towards building

new ideas, resulting from their restricted resources, may be different from how larger companies with sufficient resources operate. For instance,

Kente [Global Travel and Accommodation Software Provider] is a huge company, so I think they've probably got more people looking at the strategy at where they want to be. Whereas GoTravel which is much smaller, it's pretty much more sensible for them to say, 'let's build what our product users want because they're gonna pay us for that'. With Kente, they'll go and build something which their customers will want to pay for.

The four product users seemed to be less aware of other ways they could be contributing to the processes of developing imaginative software. For instance, by their use of GoTravel's software products daily, they seemed to be providing their time and space or autonomy to contribute new developments to existing products based on the limitations they experienced. This seemed apparent from Samuel's explanation to his friends how his team at 5-Star had:

'Learned a lesson. You have to say GoTravel has tested the product in their environment, we need to put it in ours, we need to put into pieces and see if we can use it. If we can, it's all great, then we'll roll it out. If we can't, we don't roll it out until they fix the problem'.

By testing the product in their own environment as many times as possible to ensure that it was working to standard, Samuel's example shows how his company and perhaps, many other product users, had invested their time and space in developing the product. The benefit of the 'time and space' product users offered was that, unlike their software provider who appeared to be struggling to create such 'time and space' resources internally, product users' regular use of the product and testing naturally led to provision of these resources.

Adele, Rick, Alexandria and Samuel's companies had taken part in these activities, either willingly or not, with the hope that they were potentially contributing to building new and impactful software solutions for their customers. If such improvements could be made, then they would continue to make do with GoTravel, giving their support in a host of ways. After all, compared to what was available from bigger companies, GoTravel's products were much cheaper and the company was more open to accommodating their changing requests. In addition, they felt part of a reciprocal relationship where they contributed to the product by their ideas, time, space and money and in turn received guidance from Jack and his team at GoTravel on what possible additions could be made to the product.

A number of other issues came up that evening as they rounded up their chat, including the news that their product provider, GoTravel had in recent times been consecutively nominated for a global innovative company award. Perhaps, their collaborations with the small business was yielding some results after all. With that, their meeting ended. Next year will be packed with many events and they keenly looked forward to seeing each other again.

## Commentary on Episode 5

I situate the final episode in one of the popular conferences in the software industry. While I interviewed each of the product users separately, I crafted this episode in a way that would suggest communication among product users. I used this 'conversation' as a metaphor to reflect findings from my data, which suggested that product users often 'communicated' with each other by the fact that GoTravel made products and functionalities requested and paid for by one product user available to others who shared the same product. This data was partly from press information, which showed how GoTravel had worked with specific product users to develop a functionality or product that would benefit other users. In addition, in our interviews, Hans (Support, GoTravel) explained that 'we have a whole concept of anything [product] that we do for one person is available to all'

While the setting of this 'meeting' was in one sitting, I developed the actual content of the conversations to move back and forth in time. This was to capture my perceptions of how product users' experiences with the small business had evolved over time.

The bulk of the data here came from my interviews and email conversations with each of the four product users. I supplemented these with data from each of the company's websites. For instance, I collected the background information of product users (Section 5.1.1) from their respective websites and emailed each one of them with my summary of their profile to ask if it corresponded to their current operations.

In my interviews with the four product users, they shared quite similar information regarding their experiences of doing business with GoTravel. Given the fact that they used different products as a result of the different markets they catered to, I perceived that their responses reflected perceptions of other product users. In crafting their dialogue however, I made each of them the main actor for specific themes, depending on what they emphasised in the interviews. For example, while all product users had spoken about various reasons they were reluctant to leave GoTravel, I placed emphasis on Rick, by starting the conversation on this topic with his observations because in our interviews, he often referred to why his company had not left GoTravel despite the problems they had experienced.

To sum up, this episode brings to the fore various forms of co-creation (Frow et al., 2015) that GoTravel led their product users in. For instance, Rick and Alexandria draw attention to how they had funded (co-pricing according to Frow et al.'s framework) functionalities they requested. While Product Users seemed not to be happy with all the ways they were being made to contribute to developing the software products, I closed the episode with a note that showed that at certain times, they felt their participation in improving the software product meant that they were in 'control' over their software providers. Perhaps, they even felt that they had 'appropriated' the development process. As Rick explained: 'You have to nurture the creativity with GoTravel'. This 'empowerment', as I discuss later in the chapter has been considered by some co-creation researchers to be a fallacy, used by lead organisations to lure their product users into contributing to value creation (Zwick et al., 2008).

### 5.3 Summary of Findings

In this chapter, I have presented my main findings of how a small software business, GoTravel, organised processes that could lead to new improvements in its software. The findings are in two parts. The first is that internal efforts to build new and useful solutions for clients' software problems was, indeed, difficult for the small business. I showed through my story how within GoTravel, the problem was partly due to paradoxical dilemmas that confronted management as they sought to provide a work environment to support employee creativity while simultaneously seeking efficiency in internal processes.

Secondly, I drew attention to how internal challenges small businesses face, as they seek to meet the needs of their product users and clients, may prompt them to seek alternative ways of organising processes essential for creating ingenious software functionality for their product users. I proceeded to demonstrate how GoTravel was able to put in place opportunities to access resources they needed, but lacked, from their product users to develop inventive software solutions. These resources included knowledge, new ideas, time and space as well as financial sponsorship.

In addition to the more obvious use of this chapter in my thesis, that is, to present my findings, the chapter was also intended to show the methodological advantages that storytelling offers to lay bare previously hidden social constructions and ambiguities of organisational phenomena such as creativity. In this sense, the chapter has its own merits for drawing attention to the potential enlightening role storytelling offers in illuminating usually silenced social constructions that underpin

small business' processes of developing new and useful ideas (Greenhalgh et al., 2005).

According to Chilcott and Barry (2016), stories, such as I have narrated here, are able to produce context-rich theory for a deeper understanding of creativity in the context of organisations by bringing into focus daily activities of actors that may impact development of new and useful ideas. Stories also help to establish how various factors may be related and draw attention to the fact that these factors are usually being constructed through regular interactions, rather than being stable and predictable as positivist approaches to research have assumed (Bailey et al., 2009, Chilcott & Barry, 2016).

I proceed in the subsequent chapters to show how in light of theory and existing literature, the issues I have raised in my story can potentially induce fresh insights of creativity by businesses.

## 6 DISCUSSION: CREATIVE PROCESSES OF A SMALL SOFTWARE BUSINESS

### 6.1 Introduction

My use of ‘storytelling’ in the previous chapter to present empirical findings from my research offered ways to shed light on how a small business, GoTravel, oriented itself in the midst of complex internal and external problems, and engaged in creative actions to accomplish goals that seemed beneficial in navigating such problems. The processes that underlie these ‘ways of operating’ are often used by constrained entities or organisations to bridge the gap between their limitations and opportunities for novel creation (de Certeau, 1984: 93; Manimala, 2008); additionally, they offer a powerful reflection of the organisations’ creativity, and serve as a primary resource for the study of their organisations’ creativity (Drazin et al., 1999; de Certeau, 1984).

Thus, to study GoTravel’s creativity, I focus on their ‘creative’ processes. It is useful to clarify, and recap, before proceeding, that while the bulk of existing literature conceptualise creative processes in terms of cognitive stages that lead to new and useful ideas, often called ‘creative ideas’ (e.g. Amabile & Mueller, 2008), my enquiry focuses on creativity that is inherent in the processes that are used to increase the potential for accomplishing these goals. In this sense, although GoTravel’s creative processes were motivated by end goals of developing novel and competitive products, the outcomes themselves are not the main focus of my

articulation of the organisation's creativity (Drazin et al., 1999). Instead, my focus is on the novel and appropriate (creative) attempts, or ways, the organisation used to negotiate uncertainties they faced (Nayak, 2008).

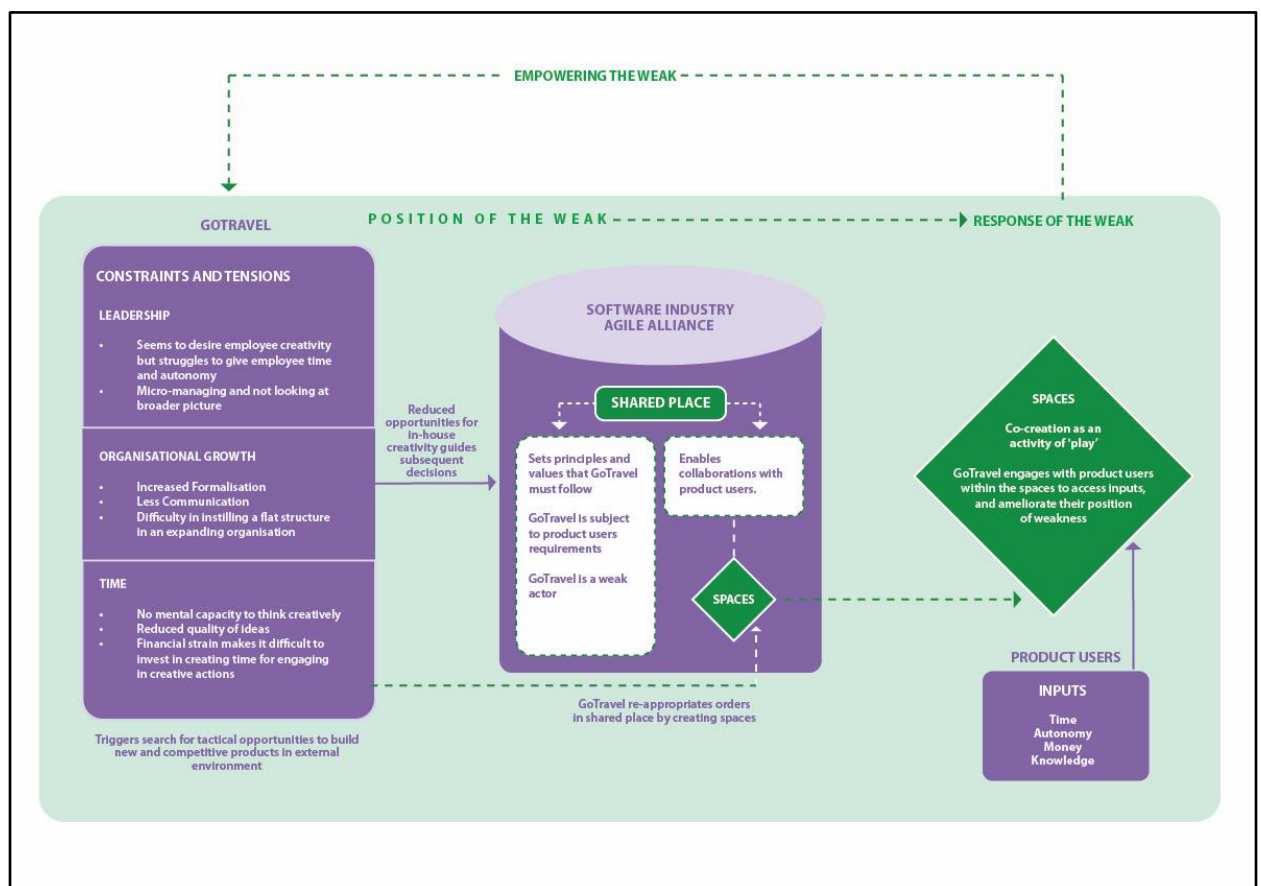
To illuminate the 'creativity' embedded in these processes, my explanation building exercise (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997) reported in Chapter 4 suggested that insights from research in entrepreneurship may be relevant. This is primarily because while entrepreneurs are often desperate to create new ventures, they do not always have the resources they need to actualise such goals (Hjorth, 2005). Manimala (2008: 119) describes this paradox as a 'mismatch between the requirements and availability of resources' that entrepreneurs have to confront in all aspects of their endeavours. To bridge this gap, entrepreneurial entities (enterprises or entrepreneurs) need to engage in creative actions in every aspect of their tasks (Manimala, 2008), including, but not limited to pursuing and taking opportunities to access relevant inputs (often from others') that increase the potential for innovating desired new ventures (Mainela & Puhakka, 2011; Leyden & Link, 2015; Hjorth, 2004). In other words, entrepreneurship processes are often replete with creative actions – that is novel and appropriate actions – used to tackle ill-defined problems in their journey towards building new enterprises (Manimala, 2008; Fillis & Rentschler, 2010). To study GoTravel's creativity, I draw on elements of the entrepreneurship literature to highlight 'creative actions' I found in the small business creative processes. This way of discussing small businesses' creative processes compares closely with Berends et al.'s (2014) conceptualisation of how innovation processes unfold among small businesses. Premised on ideas of effectuation theory



within entrepreneurship studies', the authors found that small businesses adopted a number of tactics to make other uses, usually novel ones, out of limited resources that were available to them.

In Figure 6.1, I attempt to capture three aspects of GoTravel's creative processes. These form the main themes for my discussion in the chapter.

Figure 6.1: 'Creative' Creative Processes by GoTravel



Source: Authors Drawing (Based on Research Findings and Literature)

The three main elements of creative processes that emerged from my study of GoTravel, as presented in Figure 6.1 are (1) triggers of the small businesses'

creative processes, (2) creative actions in re-appropriating orders enforced by industry actors and creating spaces within the orders, and (3) engaging in co-creation with product users. I have elaborated on each of these in the three main sections of my discussion chapter. To aid my discussions, I refer to aspects of my findings, which I presented in Chapter 5.

## 6.2 Rethinking small business constraints as triggers of creative processes (Episode 1, 2, 3)

According to my findings, GoTravel's creative processes started with difficulties they experienced in their organisation while trying to encourage employee engagement in creative actions, represented by the first rectangle. Thus, this section discusses three main organisational factors (organisational growth, leadership and time) that may have led to constraints that were inimical to employee creativity and hence, are, in the sense of mainstream literature, detrimental to organisational creativity (Amabile & Pratt, 2016, Zhou & Hoever, 2014). In discussing these factors, I draw attention to tensions that confronted the organisation as it sought to support employee's exploratory and experimental activities. Here, I note how even structural conditions (such as flat hierarchies, and open communication), that are often raised in support for internal creativity in small businesses (Dhillon et al., 2009; Valaei et al., 2016) led to unfavourable, and often, paradoxical outcomes within the organisation. Nevertheless, and supported by a bulk of studies in entrepreneurship (Mainela & Puhakka, 2011, Leyden & Link, 2015, Stevenson & Jarillo, 2007) as well as current research in creativity studies (Rosso, 2014, Fortwengel et al., 2017, Sonenshein, 2014), I also examine in Section 6.3 how these tension-laden

'limitations' within the small business seemed to have performed a more dynamic and facilitating role in triggering, that is, defining and shaping, alternative processes the organisation used to create opportunities where they could access inputs to improve the software product in novel ways. I argue that while these factors may have been inimical to employee creativity, they were also integral to the organisations' creative processes by shaping, if not enabling the ways in which it organised activities towards building new and useful ideas. In Section 6.4, I conclude by discussing how the main arguments raised in the chapter offer a basis to further study the processes small businesses use to develop new and useful ideas in new ways and contexts.

#### 6.2.1 Creativity within GoTravel – Constraints and Paradoxes

In this section, I discuss the three factors that limited the small businesses' ability to offer internal opportunities for employees to generate new ideas. Although I separate them in my discussion, it is worth noting here that this is simply to aid my explanation. These are highly interrelated factors, which reflect a highly complex effect on employee creativity within the organisation, as evident in how I crafted my story. Similar to Blomberg et al.'s (2017) observations, I found that a weakness in even one factor could lead to spiralling effects on others, and consequently, reduce opportunities to support employee creative actions within the organisation.

##### 6.2.1.1 Growth and Expansion

Not all small businesses aspire growth. However, a sizeable number desire to grow and expand (Reijonen et al., 2014). When such expectations to grow is

actualised, researchers argue that it can lead to substantial changes in small business behaviours (Wiklund et al., 2003), even if they technically remain 'small', that is, less than 250 employees (FSB, 2017). Despite these indications, I found that growth and expansion are not commonly raised by researchers when explaining factors that influence small businesses' ability to support employee engagement in activities that can lead to building novel products.

Findings from my research suggest that the growth GoTravel experienced, perhaps more than any other single factor, accounted for challenges it faced in organising their work environment to support employees' generation of novel ideas.

Documents on GoTravel's inception available online suggest that GoTravel had just three employees within the first four years of inception, rising to just about seven in the year 2000 (Chapter 4). It appeared that this small size offered GoTravel opportunities to provide a working atmosphere characterised by certain 'soft qualities' associated with operating on a small scale (Wiklund et al., 2003). For instance, in our interviews, employees reminisced the presence of positive feelings of comradeship, the fact that they could share and build on each other's ideas and how they felt involved in decision making in this period, attributes creativity scholars suggest are favourable to the processes employees use to generate new ideas (Valaei et al., 2016). Most importantly, the small business seemed to be able to support these 'soft qualities' without compromising on acceptable time frames within which it responded to product user problems, because very few employees were involved in deliberating on issues. Overall, it seemed at the time that GoTravel may

have found it easier to internally support employee practices that could help develop high quality codes and software which led to increased demand for its products.

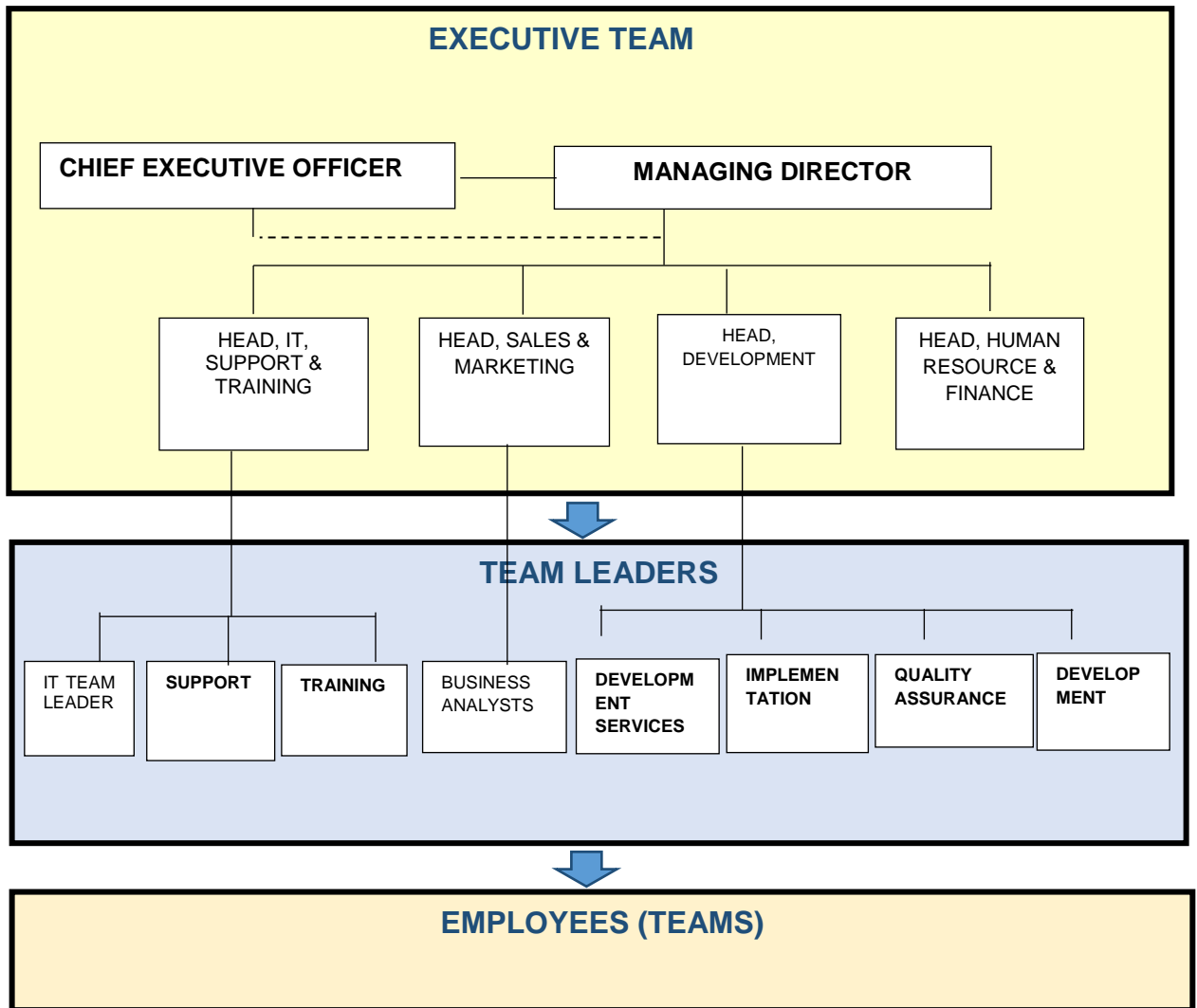
However, an increase in demand for bespoke software products the small business experienced from about 2008, according to Jack's report to industry press, available online, accelerated activities relevant to software development and increased pressure on existing employees. In response, the small business recruited more employees to be able to meet those demands and to reduce pressure on their current employees. As I reported in Episode 1 of *The Rise of the Phoenix*, this necessitated 'a massive recruitment drive in most pressured departments, such as the Support and Development Services departments', and a relocation from a one-floor apartment to a three-floor building.

While the increase in employee numbers may have provided extra support in terms of reducing the amount of work assigned to each employee, and hence offered more freedom for employees to freely engage in exploratory activities, it also led to the need to reorganise structures within the organisation in a way that made it difficult to sustain a climate that would support employee creative behaviour. In line with predictions of traditional organisational theory (McKinley, 1993), a previous study, which had been done on 'Managing Change' in GoTravel reported that the increased employee numbers necessitated some increased administration and formalisation of organisational structure at GoTravel. The study also reported that the relative large number of employees became difficult to manage, similar to findings of Hirst et al.'s (2011) study. In *The Rise of the Phoenix*, I described the situation in terms of:

‘A few concerns were shared on the need to review processes and for ways to guide employee actions which were becoming quite disorderly, but this was not taken further as other priorities relating to driving growth took more precedence’ (Episode 1).

Additionally, I observed in the second episode of the story how one of GoTravel’s first responses to its growth (in product user and employee numbers), as is perhaps typically done in most growing companies (Bowen, 2004), was to set up an additional level of management and new departments to be in charge of specific activities. I have provided a figure (Figure 6.2) of management levels in GoTravel as at the time of my internship. This figure was drawn based on my observations and guidance from an employee from the IT Department.

Figure 6.2: Management Structure



Source: Author (Based on Data from Fieldwork)

One of the reasons that was raised for the increased hierarchies was that it would ensure order and efficiency in daily organising as work processes had started overlapping in ways that affected employees' day to day activities. However, and perhaps as expected, an unfortunate impact of the additional management hierarchy

and new departments was increased 'clannishness' within departments as well as among managers on different hierarchical levels. By this, I mean that employees within departments were more inclined to interact and share ideas with one another than with colleagues from other departments. One implication of this was that ideas generated in one department, which may have potentially led to building imaginative software if discussed with colleagues from other relevant departments, often remained in the originating department. As Bright from GoTravel's Development explained:

...we're now split up over three floors, thinking whether that would be because it's kind of out of sight out of mind. Maybe our creativity is more limited and more scoped towards the development team rather than immediately thinking about other departments.

To address this clannishness, one of my tasks during the internship I had with GoTravel was to take photos of employees and build profiles (listing employees' names, department and hobbies) for a photo board to be mounted on the walls of GoTravel's Canteen (Chapter 4 and 5). This was to be used as a tool to aid familiarising among employees. In general, 'lots of monies and efforts were spent on making sure employees working from the first floor were talking to employees working from the third floor' (Enoch, Head of IT and Support).

While these efforts may have led to some success in improving communication among employees, I found it difficult to ascertain their direct effects on improving employee creativity. This is partly because, other limiting factors, such as leadership seemed to attenuate any advantages the efforts could have had on engagement in exploratory activities (I shall come to this shortly).



Furthermore, there seemed to be a similarly growing trend of clannishness among senior managers. Decision making was gradually limited to the six-member executive team GoTravel had formed to oversee affairs of the organisation. While like many typical small businesses, the 'flow (with management) remains great' and 'here you can talk to anybody' (Ella, Development), GoTravel started developing bureaucratic tendencies as they grew. Similar changes were observed in Banks et al.'s (2002) study of creativity among small media businesses where they found that, as the small businesses they studied grew, organisational structures that previously supported employee creativity declined. Ella captured this succinctly in our interview:

We're all sitting together and that's good. 'But in terms of 'what does it mean to actually have a flat structure' I won't say there's necessarily a flat structure. Being able to have a viewpoint when you talk to all those people, that's a flat structure and I'm not sure we're there yet. And also, things are quite segregated, there's a head of department group who meet all together and we're not allowed into things like that' (Ella, Development Department, GoTravel).

Ella made an interesting point in her response by drawing attention to the contrast between visible elements of organisational culture intended to support employee creativity and employees' actual experiences with these elements, in efforts to develop creative ideas (Schein, 1990). This brings into question functionalist approaches that have often based their explanation of creativity among businesses on visible elements of organisational culture such as, organisational structures and workplace architecture (Valaei et al., 2016), as it suggests that such factors may not accurately reflect organisations' commitment or ability to support the development of new and useful ideas internally.

Furthermore, in Episodes 2 and 3 of *The Rise of the Phoenix*, I reflected on dilemmas that confronted management as they sought to balance managing the company's growth to ensure efficiency, with providing support for an inclusive organisation that would encourage employees to engage in creative behaviours (such as sharing their ideas with other colleagues). For example, I noted how Jack responded to this dilemma by trying to reverse the consequences of growth that GoTravel experienced. He aimed to bring back the 'soft qualities' (Wiklund et al., 2003: 25) he had found in GoTravel years ago when he joined. For instance, he encouraged the open-plan seating where managers and employees sat together as a way of 'cutting down barriers and opening doors...no there are no doors...and removing outdated and inefficient communication channels' (Jack, M.D).

However, GoTravel had evolved over a long period and changes that sought to reverse the complex interconnections that had been established alongside growth seemed difficult to achieve (Bowen, 2004). Ella noted, 'I mean they [managers] do listen but when it comes to any company expanding, it has to have some sort of hierarchy... we're pretty much a structured organisation with some very distinct levels of hierarchy'.

Overall, it appears that growth and expansion of GoTravel 'polluted' the atmosphere of camaraderie and involvement in which employees worked and ultimately, limited their motivation to engage in actions considered creative (Wiklund et al., 2003).

#### 6.2.1.2 Time Pressure (Organisational Resource)

Availability of organisational resources is one of the most important factors that influence employee's engagement in creative actions within organisations (Caniëls et al., 2014). As revealed in my findings and collaborated by previous scholarship (Amabile, 1998; Rosso, 2014), time is the most crucial resource for coming up with new and useful ideas. Thus, I have concentrated on time here in discussing how organisational resources seemed to have influenced internal efforts at developing creative products. I also draw attention to how trying to manage and make this resource available, necessitated the use of other resources, such as money to recruit new employees, and organise off-site retreats away from the busy work environment. In addition, I discuss how time limitations may have reduced the quality of new ideas, the primary input for developing creative products (Björk & Magnusson, 2009).

Some studies suggest that an element of challenge in working against strict deadlines may translate into intrinsic motivation for employees to perform a task in creative ways (Amabile et al., 2002). However, many others have found that under most conditions, time pressure stifles the intrinsic motivation that people need to come up with imaginative responses by making them feel controlled (Rigolizzo & Amabile, 2015).

Workplace time pressure comes in two forms according to Baer and Oldham (2006). There is overall time pressure, which is the total amount of time pressure employees experience at work. Creative time pressure, however, describes

employees' perceptions of not having enough time to develop creative ideas at work. According to Baer and Oldham, where creativity is central to the job at hand, overall time pressure will directly lead to time pressure for engaging in creative activities and subsequently limit the amount and quality of creative ideas one can reasonably produce.

During my internship with GoTravel, I experienced a strong sense of a busy work environment. Employees seemed to have very little time to engage in activities that were not directly related to their daily tasks. In the story, I drew my observations together to describe how overall time pressure escalated as the company grew, and translated into time pressure specifically linked to creative activities. More precisely, it appeared that as a result of the time pressure and strict deadlines that employees worked with, engagement in activities such as identifying problems, seeking new solutions to such problems and trying out ideas, considered as essential elements of individual's creative processes (Gilson & Shalley, 2004) were significantly inhibited:

'So, people are very busy just getting through their inbox for the day and without having time and space to allow your brain to stop working and to get 2, 3 people around the table to tackle the problem, then creativity just doesn't get an opportunity to manifest'.

(Jack, M.D. GoTravel)

And

'The challenge here at GoTravel is that everyone is so busy and I think people then become quite robotic and they don't have that mental capacity to think about creativity'. (Felicia, GoTravel)

These excerpts from my interviews with Jack and Felicia reflect how overall time pressure within GoTravel may have led to time pressure that reduced opportunities for employees to engage in creative activities within GoTravel. In response, management put in place costly measures to create more time. Such measures included the introduction of off-site retreats for the executive team and other departments (such as the Support and Development Departments), that were most affected by the increasing pressure (Episode 3, The Rise of the Phoenix), which resulted from the small businesses' growth. The off-site retreats entailed going out of their usual work environment to bond and deliberate on issues. As Felicia explained 'it's a bail out when we go offsite once every four months now to talk about how we're driving the company forward'.

In addition, as noted in the previous sub-section, GoTravel recruited new employees than 'absolutely needed to allow us more time to start thinking about process improvement' (Jack, M.D.). While these may have been helpful in reducing the amount of time pressure employees had to work with, it did not seem to have helped with the time pressure employees experience as demand for bespoke products and functionality from product users kept growing.

I consider that one of the most worrying effects time pressure may have had on building imaginative products in general was the quality of ideas that employees and management could reasonably develop. As a software business operating in a highly competitive industry, high quality ideas are useful to GoTravel as these ideas have the highest potential to result in innovation that creates value for business growth (Björk & Magnusson, 2009). On the other hand, ideas which only lead to

minor improvements may deliver returns which are not adequate to justify cost of implementation (Björk & Magnusson, 2009).

In my story of GoTravel's creativity, I noted how apparent lack of originality in their products was a matter of concern at a major company meeting held in January 2011. This was to draw attention to how the problems the company was facing, particularly, in terms of limited time resources, seemed to affect efforts in coming up with new and effective ideas. Specifically, I described how members of the Executive Board had discussed drop-in sales for GoTravel's main product, 'Altitude', because products users felt that this product lacked the modifications needed to address growing demands of their markets.

Jack seemed to have been similarly affected by the time pressure. Our first encounter with Jack in my story was as a polymath whose wealth of ideas and experiences were indispensable for developing responses that may be considered novel and effective. I presented him as someone who deeply understood the affairs of the business, its capabilities and the nature of its markets. He also interacted frequently with product users, building up his sense-making and proclivity to idea generation. Thus, in principle, Jack should have been a reservoir of high quality ideas (Powell, 2008; Rigolizzo & Amabile, 2015). My findings however suggest that as the company grew, Jack came up against severe time limitations partly due to responding to multiple problems at a micro-level. This may have reduced his ability to develop high quality ideas. As he admitted:

'The drawback (of GoTravel's flat structure) is that, everyone gets dragged into a deep amount of detail, whereas in larger organisations, certain levels

of management are abstracted from certain level of detail and actually the benefit of that is that they naturally have more head space to think strategically, to think creatively’.

(Jack, M.D.)

I draw two main conclusions from this excerpt. First, Jack’s ability to engage in processes essential for developing high quality creative ideas seemed to have been limited by the multiplicity of demands he had to address on a daily basis. The second is that while Jack sought to involve employees in developing ideas that would aid the creative process, I also perceive that he had an underlying conflict in who should lead the internal processes of creating inventive products, appearing to support the view that it remains a management responsibility. He indicates in this excerpt the need to have a specialised set of people, usually top management, to ‘be in charge of creativity’ which as I demonstrated in my story, is a task he seemed to have taken up. I take a closer look at his efforts in taking charge in the final factor of leadership, which in my view, constrained employee creativity in GoTravel.

#### 6.2.1.3 Leadership

As Managing Director of GoTravel, Jack seemed to have had a central influence on work processes in general, and organisational members’ creative actions in particular (Episode 1, The Rise of the Phoenix). I drew attention to this in my story of GoTravel’s creative processes by developing the plots of the first and second episodes to largely centre on him. Scholars have consistently pointed to the significant role leaders play in influencing creativity at the workplace (Zhou & Hoever, 2014). Mostly, they emphasise how leaders must relinquish control in order to

successfully encourage employee creativity (Zhang & Bartol, 2010). They argue that leaders who give considerable latitude to employees in meeting their goals will potentially benefit from a rise in the manifestation of creative behaviour among employees and thus an increase in organisational creativity (Zhang & Bartol, 2010, Rosso, 2014).

In my story, I identified interesting ways by which Jack's leadership may have influenced employee creativity at GoTravel. In one sense, Jack seemed to have had a desire for employees to explore new possibilities aimed at improving software functionalities. This was reflected in his support for mechanisms such as a flat structure and a 'no door' policy that would encourage creativity through practices such as, idea sharing (Episode 1, Episode 3, the Rise of the Phoenix). However, Jack's desire for an organisation characterised by open-communication, where employees would freely share ideas and where those ideas will be given space to be explored and experimented with, seemed incongruent with the small business' needs and resource capacity.

In organisations of all sizes, investing resources such as time and money to encourage activities, which lead to building inventive products may be constrained because other organisational priorities similarly compete for such resources (Baer, 2012). This problem is particularly severe for small businesses given that they operate with relatively lesser resources (Scozzi et al., 2005). In response, small businesses usually support the development of a few and focused set of ideas that can be funded with the limited resources they have (Valaei et al., 2016).



In the case of GoTravel, even when Jack's efforts motivated employees to engage in useful activities such as, generating new and useful ideas, they could not always be implemented due to their limited financial and human resources (Mazzei et al., 2016).

'Yeah they've [larger companies] got more money so they can spend more time on R & D. At the moment, we (GoTravel) often say 'oh, actually that might be a good idea but, actually, we've got so many other things to do'. ...and we can't have an R & D department'.

(Jeff, H.R.).

In this extract, Jeff compares how availability of resources often differentiates large businesses' ability to support employee creativity from that of small businesses. Partly as a result of their relative paucity of resources, GoTravel, perhaps similar to other small businesses, seemed unable to support activities relevant for new idea generation among a wide number of employees.

Consequently, it appeared that the most logical and efficient approach for Jack to lead the small business was to adopt a strong internal locus of control (Charles & Sawyer, 2004). This was accompanied by closely monitoring and intervening in employees' tasks when new ideas were needed (Amabile et al., 2004).

Thus, while on the one hand, the management practices he pursued, such as encouraging a flat hierarchy and promoting a 'no-door' policy, may have been important for creating a conducive work environment (Amabile & Pratt, 2016), organisational realities compromised the extent to which these efforts could promote desired employee creative behaviours (Rigolizzo & Amabile, 2015). This observation

is similar to one Ella (Development, GoTravel) made that the visible elements of GoTravel's culture that seemed to support employee creativity did not necessarily reflect the small business' commitment and ability to ensure this.

Furthermore, Jack's centrality in work processes in GoTravel in general, may have reduced employee autonomy. My findings, corroborated by other findings of other studies (Hirst et al., 2011), suggest that Jack's centrality in work processes reduced employees' ability to explore new opportunities and ideas. Employee autonomy, the degree of freedom that employees have to undertake their work provides intrinsic motivation that encourages them to engage in activities relevant for building novel responses (Sternberg, 2012; Hirst et al., 2011). According to literature, employees who have the skills for coming up with new ideas, such as tolerance for ambiguity and flexibility in seeking alternative solutions to problems, may manifest more explorative behaviours when they work under conditions that offer them with, at least, moderate levels of autonomy (Amabile & Pratt, 2016).

My story of GoTravel's creativity (Episode 3) had examples of how employees perceived their organisation as not providing sufficient latitude to take new perspectives on problems or to experiment with ideas for addressing problems they faced. By space, I mean opportunities and freedom to consider and explore new solutions on their own. There were contrasting views by employees of the effects this had on their daily work. A significant minority, expressed frustration at not being allowed 'to have their own ideas about how things should be handled' (Ella, Development Team).

'Sometimes you have to kind of swing for yourself. Whereas, if you're surrounded by technically able people from above, I mean Fabrizio (CEO, GoTravel) is not a technical person which is why I think, I've heard some people say that they work better with him because he's more likely to listen to your technical arguments and you're more able to implement, whereas, if you go to people, someone such as Jack, who's technically fantastic will have his own ideas about the way things should be handled' (Ella, Development Team).

And

'I think for an MD he's quiet heavily involved in what goes on in each of the teams. And part of the issue is that he has a deep understanding of the industry. I'm used to working for a bigger organisation where probably 9, 10 of what you did, you didn't even discuss with your boss. Whereas here, when I sit down with Jack I'll probably discuss 6, 7 things of what I'm doing' (Felicia, Sales and Marketing).

In these extracts, Ella and Felicia express views that appear to suggest that Jack's centrality reduces their freedom in carrying out daily tasks and making decisions in ways they would like. The consequence of this, as Martins & Terblanche's (2003) found in their review of literature, could be feelings of being disempowered, and hence, reduction in levels of employee creativity.

On the other hand, some employees expressed satisfaction that Jack was available to intervene and address problems they faced, referring to the time efficiency this practice ensured. Hans (Support, GoTravel), for instance, considered it a helpful approach because:

'It's just so important that the hour is not wasted...where I can waste two or three people's time, they're not sure, we're balling around or something. And I tell people 'just ask'. Do you know who we need to ask? Well, the man here to ask is Jack'

Perhaps, the fact that some employees, such as Hans, welcomed Jack's approach made it difficult for him to step away from this position of being in charge of developing responses (including creative ones) to company and product users' problems.

Whatever perspective they had, my understanding of leadership and employee creativity in GoTravel is that employee autonomy, essential for creative thinking (Zhang & Bartol, 2010), was undermined. 'He (Jack) sort of ends up making the decisions because people talk to him and have discussions with him and he suggests solutions. His solutions (Felicia, Sales and Marketing Head).

#### 6.2.2 Synthesis of the organisational factors relevant for creativity

So far, in the chapter, I have discussed factors that may have limited possibilities for developing new and useful ideas within GoTravel. While there may have been a host of others, I focused my discussion on three that seemed particularly influential. These three, and a host of others identified in other studies (Oldham & Cummings; 1996), are often raised as organisational factors that must be managed carefully, in order to promote a conducive atmosphere for employees to engage in exploratory actions that could possibly lead to new ideas (Isaksen & Akkermans, 2011, Maas & de Coning, 1999). Without this, creativity researchers suggest that it will be difficult to improve the organisations' potential to build imaginative products through its employees (Amabile & Pratt, 2016, Andriopoulos, 2001). For instance, the Componential Model of creativity, discussed in Chapter 2, suggests that organisational creativity is a matter of how factors within the work

environment interact with three innate components or characteristics of individuals or teams (organisational members), to influence their success in generating new ideas (Amabile, 2012; Amabile & Pratt, 2016). The three components are domain relevant skills (individuals' technical expertise and knowledge), creativity relevant processes (personality factors such as tolerance for ambiguity, risk taking), and task motivation (made up of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation). According to the model, an organisations' internal work environment should provide opportunities for exploratory activities and employee autonomy, and encourage idea generation techniques such as brainstorming (Rigolizzo & Amabile, 2015).

Although conducting tests to determine individual innate abilities, described as intrinsic components in the model was outside the scope of my research, my findings offer some indications that the bulk of GoTravel's employees may have possessed these components. Through casual conversations I held with employees, I realised that prior to joining GoTravel, most had worked in various roles within the accommodation industry GoTravel serves. Thus, to some extent, they may have had domain relevant knowledge that could provide them with alternative pathways in seeking solutions to problems (Rigolizzo & Amabile, 2015). In addition, employees were likely to have creativity-relevant processes given that GoTravel often sought employees who seemed to have the drive and persistence to create value using original solutions. In interviews with the Head of HR, I found that recruitment of new staff was not just about getting good people in but also 'we want someone that once they've learned the role, they can stand on their own two feet and add value' and 'you can usually have a sense when someone has got that about them, the x-factor

(Jeff, H.R., GoTravel). By the x-factor, Jeff meant talented individuals who were likely to imaginatively carry out their tasks. Finally, employees seemed to have task motivation that is often linked to creative actions (Dimaunahan & Amora, 2016). For instance, some common ways employees described their work during interviews (which I did with them as part of building an employee profile for the company's photo board) was as challenging and fulfilling, examples of factors Zhang & Barton (2010) suggest may indicate intrinsic motivation:

"I like GoTravel because the work is very varied. Obviously, there are set roles, but each day is different, and that makes my work very interesting and fun" (Employee, Support Department – from Employee Photoboard)', and

'I love working for GoTravel mainly because of my wonderful colleagues who are as passionate about their job as I am...and of course, being a travel agent and GoTravel customer in the past, I can say that one of the great things you get working for GoTravel is confidence in the product' (Employee, Development – from Employee Photoboard)

Overall, most employees felt their job at GoTravel was challenging in ways that could have engendered high intrinsic motivation to undertake their daily work in novel ways. Based on these considerations, one could argue that GoTravel's employees, to an extent, had the intrinsic components often associated with individual's likelihood of engaging in actions with the potential to realise new and relevant ideas (Amabile & Pratt, 2016).

Yet, the corresponding work environment of their organisation, called the social environment in the Componential Model, appeared uncondusive for organisational members to exercise their creative tendencies (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). Given that the work environment is the most important component that determines organisational members' engagement in creative actions (Amabile &

Pratt, 2016), GoTravel's work environment, represented by the factors discussed in section 6.2.1, seemed to have been inimical to internal efforts at developing novel ideas (Dimaunahan & Amora, 2016). For instance, even if employees had domain relevant skills or creativity relevant processes, severe time pressure at GoTravel led to little or no time for them to seek alternative ways of conceptualising problems. Where employees experienced task motivation, their ability to translate this into relevant actions for crafting new ideas may have been undermined by close monitoring of their activities by management, and the need to get things done quickly. In closing Episode 3 of *The Rise of the Phoenix*, I described this finding as 'conflicting and paradoxical':

'On certain occasions, it appeared management was keen to provide resources, such as time, autonomy and financial resources employees needed to explore new ideas. At other times however, GoTravel as an organisation and particularly, managers, seemed to prioritise efficiency over equipping employees to engage in creative activities. Most times, it was difficult to decipher which one was ahead in priorities (Episode 3).

Moghimi & Subramaniam's findings (2013) offer an alternative way to interpret how factors within GoTravel, may have been detrimental to internal activities relevant for coming up with new and useful ideas. According to the authors, one crucial factor that affects employees' actions in coming up with new and useful ideas relates to their perceptions of the availability of resources, such as time and money, for engaging in exploratory and experimental actions. Without explicit assurance that these are available, employees are likely to invest their efforts into what they consider to be of priority to their organisations (Moghimi & Subramaniam, 2013). Against this background, it would appear that the emphasis on meeting customer's demands on time, which Enoch (I.T. Department GoTravel) and Hans (Support

Department) both described in *The Rise of the Phoenix* signalled employees to prioritise efficient actions that could lead to addressing those demands, while avoiding engagement in exploratory actions considered detractive. As Phil from IT explained,

‘one of the most important constraints is probably time. I mean if a customer says, ‘do it’, they want it done. We can’t say ‘hey, wait, we’re gonna do this revolution you’ll see it’s great’.

Phil’s view seemed common among employees as most considered meeting product users’ demands a priority for their organisation.

One of the surprising insights from the discussions I have raised so far relates to the unexpected ways that the structural and behavioural advantages often ascribed to small businesses (Dhillon et al., 2009) manifested in GoTravel. As discussed in Chapter 3, small businesses are often distinguished from larger businesses on the basis of having behavioural advantages, such as faster internal communication and fewer bureaucracies that allow them to support employees’ engagement in creative activities (Valaei et al., 2016). However, similar to most growing businesses (Anderson & Ullah, 2014, Hirst et al., 2011), GoTravel started developing bureaucratic tendencies, and some departments and levels of management began to operate clannishly. Thus, while they remained technically small (about 69 employees at the time of my data collection), they did not seem to enjoy the soft advantages that scholars often attribute to their small size (Wiklund et al., 2003).



Furthermore, attempts to respond to the structural limitations they experienced by for instance, enforcing a culture of no hierarchies in the face of growth, led to outcomes that did not seem to support actions favourable to building new and useful ideas within the small organisation. In fact, as discussed, some of the attempts the organisation made to maintain a dynamic organisation seemed to undermine employee opportunities for building new products. For example, attempts to operate like a flat organisation with 'no doors', seemed easy to achieve, in that members of the organisation, regardless of their management level, sat together. Yet, this also made it easier for management, particularly Jack, to be more visible across departments, and to micro-manage daily affairs of employees, thereby reducing their autonomy (Durst & Runar Edvarsson, 2014).

Thus, in addition to the constraints that employees may have experienced as a result of the nature of the work environment, a secondary issue, obvious in the discussions I have raised, are the tensions that characterised internal attempts at developing new and useful ideas in GoTravel. In Figure 6.2, I show this using the lower arrow that connects GoTravel to their external environment to show its instrumentality in guiding the small businesses' actions of seeking opportunities elsewhere to build competitive products. Such tensions have been noted to be a common organisational concern in managing creativity and may be even more pronounced in firms that are constrained in some way (Rosso, 2014). As observed in Episode 3 of my story:

The 'challenge' that Felicia talked about, tensions induced by efforts aimed at creating a flat hierarchy in an organisation that largely revolved around Jack's leadership, seemed to be at the centre of limitations on employees'

engagement in actions necessary for crafting original software solutions. In a sense, it seemed to be intricately linked with other problems in GoTravel's work environment, such as time pressure, reduced employee autonomy and lack of space to experiment with ideas (Episode 3, The Rise of the Phoenix).

Such constraint – induced tensions have been evidenced to limit the possible alternatives available to teams working to develop new products (Rosso, 2014).

Notwithstanding the above, GoTravel, according to industry standards, was an innovative company that seemed to respond to customer needs using novel and competitive technology. Online information from one of their industry's global award webpages named the small business as a consecutive nominee for highly competitive awards in providing innovative technology to the market (Chapter 5). I perceived that the ways in which the small business was able to shift from the organisational conditions discussed earlier, to such outcomes could offer insights into their creativity. Here, literature on entrepreneurship usefully suggests that entrepreneurial processes – often laden with creativity – proceed from such limitations and progress to the creation of new ventures (Leyden & Link, 2015). Thus, the bulk of existing literature's view that interactions between factors within organisations' work environment and employee characteristics are the essence of organisational creativity (Table 2.1, Chapter 2) appears limiting in explaining GoTravel's creativity, which I suggest was reflected in how the organisation oriented itself when faced with such constraints, and sought ways to achieve inputs they needed for building highly impactful software products.

While my intention is not to suggest that prevailing approaches have made erroneous conclusions, I suggest that, given the contradictory environment of small

businesses, and taking note of their internal constraints, fresh opportunities remain to extend knowledge of creativity of such small businesses. Small business researchers unambiguously support this view by contending that creative processes of small businesses differ significantly from their larger counterparts (Maas & de Coning, 1999; Moghimi & Subramaniam, 2013; Shin et al., 2013). This is due to a number of reasons including operating with lesser resources and being relatively more vulnerable to industry conditions (Berends et al., 2014). Before I move to section two to discuss some of the creative actions that characterised GoTravel's creative processes that were aimed at accomplishing goals relevant for building novel software products, I suggest explicitly how the constraints and tensions

### 6.2.3 Internal Constraints as Triggers of GoTravel's Creative Processes

The discussions above point to internal constraints that I consider to have prompted, as well as guided GoTravel to seek creative ways of creating opportunities for building new and useful products.

My discussions have suggested that GoTravel struggled to provide a conducive working environment to employees in ways that would encourage their engagement in creative actions. It was not surprising that beyond typical definitions of creativity as using new and useful ideas to address problems at work, a recurring theme that came up when organisational members' defined creativity in our interviews was in terms of opportunities to engage in activities that could possibly lead to novel and relevant ideas. As I described in the commentary on Episode 2,

they often referred to not having sufficient resources such as time and space (autonomy) (Please see Table 6.1).

Table 6.1: Defining Organisational Creativity in GoTravel

Name	Department	Definition
Suprana	Support	I don't think we're that creative in the sense that you think about it. <b>We don't have time to sit there and be creative.</b> But saying that, we've actually got a session tomorrow offsite which could possibly <b>allow us to sit down and be creative.</b>
Enoch	IT and Support	I'll describe it as problem solving. I'll describe it as work-arounds. <b>I'll describe it as free time to think, to get away from your day to day job...</b> pretty much all those
Hans	Support	I think it's often about <b>getting time away from day-to-day work.</b> You've got no interruptions, you can't have any conversations, and you just have focused time. We are actually <b>being very creative</b> , probably for the last six months especially; <b>where we've gone and taken them out of the building for a day</b> to talk to them about things
Felicia	Sales and Marketing	The creative meeting is where everyone talks about what they want to talk about. It's meant to be a non-conventional meeting; <b>it gives time and space</b> to actually sort of talk about other stuff. I think by <b>allowing people space to step away from their day-to-day environment.</b> And the challenge here at GoTravel is that <b>everyone is so busy and I think people then become quite robotic</b> and they don't have that mental capacity to think about creativity. It's <b>a bail out when we go offsite</b> once every four months now to talk about how we're driving the company forward.
Jack	Development Services	And <b>that [off-site session] was creativity.</b> You don't use laptops, turn off PDAs whatever, phones, no distractions, pull the blinds. <b>You know, you're trying to get away from the world</b>
Kaushik	IT	I think the <b>creativity atmosphere is a small pocket of time</b> as well.
Jack	Managing Director	There's <b>less time and less capacity to create the space to be creative</b> and that I think will be more prevalent in a small business like ours

According to the bulk of research in entrepreneurship, such limitations or constraints are commonly experienced by entrepreneurs, and usually form part of

the reasons for tactical and creative actions they take towards securing opportunities for entrepreneurial innovation (Mainela & Puhakka, 2011; Manimala, 2008). Given the similarities that underlie entrepreneurship and creativity processes (Hjorth, 2005), I argue that the limitations GoTravel experienced internally may have similarly signalled the need for the small business to engage in creative actions in the ways they sought and pursued opportunities for developing new and useful ideas in alternative places. Specifically, given their lack of resources to support the development of new and useful products internally, they sought opportunities outside their own organisation, to leverage on the interactive spaces they shared with their networks, in order to access the resources, they may have lacked (Banks et al., 2002, Sapsed et al., 2008).

In Episode 4 of The Rise of The Phoenix, I showed how Felicia recognised opportunities for the small business to access some of these resources from product users who the small business worked closely with, as a result of requirements of the agile methodology. Having previously worked for one of GoTravel's product users, Felicia felt GoTravel did not sufficiently 'occupy the customers' space'. She observed that it was a common problem for small software companies:

I think, probably, certainly the sort of smaller software houses; I think they very much think about their products. And perhaps forget about what the customer's motivation is. They are trying to reach the customer, but they end up talking about things in their language (Felicia, Sales and Marketing. GoTravel)

Felicia seemed to be aware that product users had knowledge and ideas that would be difficult for GoTravel to have internally, but needed to build competitive products. This was partly due to her recognition of how leadership in GoTravel could work to

undermine employees' engagement in exploratory actions. Hans from GoTravel's Support Team supported this view that product users were useful to GoTravel's attempts at building such products by suggesting that:

'the customer requirements, they are always ongoing. So, like we had this, we had this product, we sold this to ABC and ABC said, 'that's fine, but what about if we add these two bolts on to this piece of software, we'll pay for them'. We say 'ok, if you are paying for them' So we can be led...the creativity can be external. It doesn't have to be starting here at all'.

While Hans' use of the term 'creativity' in this interview was in reference to ideas and money from product users, I perceive that he may also have been referring to creativity as defined by majority of employees in GoTravel, in terms of the fact that product users had time and autonomy, which they could invest into developing competitive software functionalities.

Partly due to the reasons Hans and Felicia identified, GoTravel responded to their own constraints by seeking closer opportunities to engage with product users. In other words, GoTravel treated and defined factors within their organisation, even though constraining, as integral elements of their creative processes. Specifically, I argue that the business responded to the paradoxes introduced by constraints within their organisation positively, by considering them as 'helpful boundaries in *provoking* and *structuring* the collective creative process' (Rosso, 2014: 578). As I used the 'resolution' in my story (Episode 4 of the Rise of the Phoenix) to highlight, the factors discussed, which posed a dilemma to management on the best possible ways to support the development of new and useful ideas within the organisation, were also fundamental to GoTravel's activities towards creating opportunities for building imaginative products. Essentially, the realisation of constraints within their internal

environment seemed to have prompted an approach to building new and useful ideas that revolved around strategies to access inputs (including resources, actions and knowledge) they needed, but lacked, for building inventive products.

A supporting explanation for this way of conceiving how factors within GoTravel's work environment may have enabled their creative approach to processes for reaching their goals comes from the social constructionist approach I have adopted for my research. Proponents of this approach suggest that the reality of creativity in particular contexts can only be defined and uncovered by those who experience it (Taylor & Callahan, 2005). This reality is usually based on their lived experiences, and become reservoirs of actions from which they draw to enact their creative behaviours (Gomes et al., 2016, Banks et al., 2003). In this sense, it appears that organisational members' reference to sites away from their day to day work, such as offsite meetings, as fertile sites for engaging in activities that could lead to developing novel creative ideas, rather than their internal work environment (Table 6.1), may have influenced the organisations decisions in 'relocating' its search for inputs for building new products to environments they associated with availability of time, autonomy, financial resources and participation (I shall discuss these in detail in the last section of this chapter). In their study of small media firms, Banks et al. (2002) arrived at similar conclusions. They found that the factors the businesses they studied valued, influenced how those businesses defined and managed creativity. For instance, media firms offering advertising services defined creativity in terms of their own abilities in managing clients for creative outcomes. Hence in enacting creativity, they emphasised ways of tapping product users' potential to

contribute to building inventive products. On the other hand, media firms engaged in digital arts considered creativity to be a distinctive autonomous process of coming up with new and useful ideas for clients, as opposed to with clients.

#### 6.2.4 Section Summary

In this section, I have made two main arguments. The first is that GoTravel, similar to other small businesses, was resource-constrained in terms of the resources needed to support employee creativity within the organisation. Second, and most importantly, I have started an argument that the small business seemed to have put its internal limitations to other uses in their creative processes, by allowing it to guide their resulting creative activities towards building new and improved software products and solutions. This is partly reflected in how the organisation reconceptualised its internal limitations as signals to seek new opportunities elsewhere that could support building new and useful products. In this sense, my thesis shifts from mainstream approaches, which often treat organisational structures as static independent variables that affect employee creativity (Rigolizzo & Amabile, 2015), towards a more dynamic view of these structures as integral elements of creative processes that are enacted by relevant actors (Fortwengel et al., 2017). This shift also removes the research limelight from top-down, managerial-oriented explanations for how organisations come to build creative solutions and creates an opening towards micro-level insights of the ways in which novel activities may emerge in organised and yet, unexpected ways, which forms the basis of my discussion in the next section.



It is worth making a point here on my use of constraints as integral aspects of creative processes as opposed to inhibitors. My view of how GoTravel's constraints influenced the businesses' subsequent creative behaviour aligns, to some extent, with perspectives of researchers who have considered that in themselves, constraints can enable engagement in creative actions (Caniëls & Rietzschel, 2013, Rigolizzo & Amabile, 2015). However, the focus of these researchers has been on how, under certain circumstances, individual employees may perceive constraints as a challenge and hence, seek creative ways of solving problems. In my discussion, I have not considered the constraints in this way because where different constraints come together to reduce freedom or leads to task complexity, as appears to be the case in GoTravel, it is usually detrimental to individual and employee creativity (Rigolizzo & Amabile, 2015). Instead, I have treated these constraints as integral to creative processes at the level of the organisation, in line with researchers who argue that constraints within organisations may be beneficial to creative activities by collectives (such as whole organisations). Specifically, collectives may embrace the constraints as integral parts of creative processes (Rosso, 2014), and use remarkably imaginative ways to seek resources outside their immediate environments for improved performance (Partanen et al., 2008).

I have attempted to analyse the meanings relevant actors of a small business associated with creativity. I must note that as a researcher, I have also brought personal lenses from my observations of GoTravel and my understanding of employee narratives in selecting and emphasising these meanings. Thus, I do not

claim them as an objective representation of employees' perceptions of how GoTravel affects their engagement in creative activities. Instead, I present them as a joint reproduction of knowledge between myself and the context I studied (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2009). Most importantly, these meanings do not only guide creative processes at the level of the organisation but also, holds valuable insights to my study of such processes as they direct attention to consequent ways the small business facilitated the generation of new and useful ideas, which I discuss in the next chapter.

A logical next step in my thesis, which till this point has argued that constraining organisational structures and resource constraints small businesses experience provoke creative ways of securing opportunities for developing new products, is to explore the resulting processes that GoTravel used to create avenues for developing new and useful ideas. In the next chapter, I discuss how the small business saw opportunities to excel in creativity in the interactive spaces they shared with product users, which the agile method made possible. However, this shared environment also presented its own constraints, which GoTravel had to tactically re-appropriate in order to access the inputs they needed. Once again, studies from entrepreneurship enlighten the creative ways the small business went about turning what appeared to be constraining to an advantage for building creative products.

### 6.3 Creativity by GoTravel – Operating under Managerial Orders (Episode 4, 5)

This section is about how GoTravel, in response to the internal limitations discussed in Chapter 6, creatively advanced processes towards designing new and useful software. I argue here that GoTravel advanced its creative processes by pursuing opportunities they recognised in the collaborations they shared with their product users, which the agile methodology of developing software had necessitated. However, as I illustrated by the elements in the Software Industry in Figure 6.1, attached to these collaborations were ‘orders’ that placed GoTravel in a disadvantaged position, primarily in the form of having to follow the requirements of the Agile Alliance and product users in software development processes. As Lin et al. (2009) advised, organisations seeking to pursue successful relationships with their networks must recognise and manage possible effects of the institutional context in which their networks operate. Placed in such a ‘weak’ position in its industry context, the small business responded by engaging in tactical or creative actions (de Certeau, 1984) to divert the impositions into other uses that enabled them to access relevant inputs from product users for building highly competitive software products, as well ameliorate the ‘weak’ position they occupied. I have used ‘inputs’ in a similar way as Leyden & Link (2015) instead of just resources. This is because as I discuss in the final section of the chapter, GoTravel, in addition to offering their resources, also offered their participation to contribute to GoTravel’s goals.

To develop my discussions in this section, I use Hjorth’s spatial concepts of ‘place’ (of dominant managerial orders or ‘strategies’) and, ‘space’ (established by

the 'weak' using tactical actions), which he applied to study and analyse the creative ways in which entrepreneurial processes unfold under imposed systems to shed light on how GoTravel re-appropriated the impositions attached to their external environment, and created spaces for play as part of its creative processes. As de Certeau (1984), the theorist on whose work Hjorth's articulation is based explained, this act of re-appropriating, of making other uses out of the dominant order, is a creative action that lowly, unassuming entities engage in daily to their advantage. They do so to be able to survive within the rules set by various 'strategies' they operate under.

Hjorth's concepts of creating 'spaces for play' within an 'ordered place' are especially useful to further analyse creativity by GoTravel, as it allows me to think through the imaginative ways GoTravel created fertile opportunities to develop relevant inputs for new software, while operating under the rules and principles present in the software industry. Importantly, his emphasis on the creation of opportunities (Hjorth, 2005) is useful for grasping how a small business like GoTravel, could take an active role in developing new and relevant products - by creating opportunities to realise imaginative ideas - in an industry that, on first glance, appears to be ruled by the creative and innovative acts of large companies, such as Amadeus.

Thus, in the discussions that follow, I further my study of GoTravel's creativity, by situating their creative processes alongside Hjorth's ideas. Here, I illuminate the tactical ways by which small businesses, who may be 'weak', due to their own internal constraints, and especially due to their vulnerability and sensitivity to

external factors, in the case of GoTravel, orders set by powerful actors in their industry, may nonetheless be able to organise processes that can support building new products. While within entrepreneurship studies, de Certeau's work and that of Hjorth have often been applied to individuals under constraints (e.g. Dey & Teasdale, 2015; Sundin & Tillmar, 2008), I am able to apply their concepts to study creative actions an organisation, GoTravel, engaged in as part of its creative journey because they focused on ways of operating under constraints, which is the primary focus of my study. In addition, de Certeau (1984), in his works, often described whole cultures or group of consumers as 'the weak' who engage in such tactical behaviours.

I begin the section by elaborating and discussing the 'place' in which GoTravel had started operating and the 'strategies' that governs through this place. While this 'place' was shared with product users, who as discussed in Section 1 of this chapter, seemed to have the inputs GoTravel needed to develop novel software, it was also governed by a group of software practitioners, the Agile Alliance, whose principles on developing software reflected in a 'managerial order', and placed GoTravel in a 'weak' position. I then move on to explore how GoTravel re-appropriated (Petitgand, 2016), or made new uses out of, what appeared to be constraining factors in this 'shared place' (de Certeau, 1984). Based on my findings, I identify the new uses to be in the form of creating 'spaces' to facilitate activities of 'play' relevant for new and improved software.

### 6.3.1 Going Agile, Working Together in a Shared Place

According to de Certeau (1984) and Hjorth (2005), there is a lot to learn about creativity in the everyday practices that the ‘weak’ or entrepreneurs use to express their agency in the ways they resist impositions set for them. These manifestations of creativity are especially illuminated when such actions are aimed at creating opportunities for novel outcomes (de Certeau, 1984). To understand GoTravel’s creativity, which I argue was partly manifest in its re-appropriation of ‘managerial orders’ in their external environment (where they had recognised opportunities, in the form of product users’ latent inputs – i.e. in a state that was not readily accessible (Mainela & Puhakka, 2011), there is a need, first, to examine the ‘managerial order’ under whose regime GoTravel, and other software businesses are increasingly operating, as well as the ‘place’, where the ‘managerial orders’ prescribed rules and principles for the ways such businesses should develop software in recent times are enforced (de Certeau, 1984). Re-appropriation entails the activities of the ‘weak’ in diverting the intended purposes of their managerial order for other uses, usually, uses that are imaginative and novel (Petitgand, 2016). The managerial order, or ‘strategy’, according to de Certeau (1984), is an entity with distinctive knowledge which it uses to impose a sort of power, in the form of rules, guidelines or behavioural expectations, on the ‘weak’ to achieve certain goals, often goals that reinforce its position of power.

Practitioner reports available online and software development researchers identify the Agile Alliance, a group of influential software practitioners, as a powerful institution in the current era of the software industry (Agile Alliance, 2018; Turk et

al., 2014) (Figure 6.1). This is partly because of The Alliance's instrumental role in leading a shift to agile development methodologies, as an alternative to traditional, and heavy methodologies, which industry practitioners had critiqued for not being able to welcome necessary changes that emerged after development had started (Jiang & Eberlin, 2009; Agile Alliance, 2008). As noted in Episode 4 of *The Rise of the Phoenix*, GoTravel was one of the companies that had recently moved to agile methodologies:

'That's [upstairs meeting for development team members] also part of our move towards, you might have heard of agile development, which is all about better knowledge about where everyone is in their development stages, greater awareness and smaller or granular breakdown of our work tasks such that they're slightly more flexible and we can more easily adapt and direct ourselves, which is something that's come up recently' (Ella, Development).

In addition to the initial contribution The Alliance made to the industry by leading the shift to agile ways of developing software, they continue to undertake activities in the industry that has led them to occupy a powerful position, similar to the 'strategy' or 'managerial order' de Certeau (1984) and Hjorth (2005) described respectively. Specifically, the group seems to have 'appropriated' or taken ownership (Hjorth, 2005) of the software industry, by drawing up and enforcing specific principles and values in a manifesto that dictates how businesses should develop software (Chapter 1, Section 1.4.1). Scholars and practitioners have described The Alliance as a movement that has changed the course of the relatively nascent software industry (Pathak & Saha, 2013).

While some of the extreme examples de Certeau (1984) used to describe the power the 'strategy' wields, such as how Spanish rulers exercised authority over the

Indigenous Indian culture, seem to suggest an oppressive kind of rule, it appears that 'strategies' may often be motivated by what they consider to be goals of a common good. This means that strategies may not explicitly consider their activities as 'appropriating' a 'place', or taking ownership in the ways that literature suggests (Dey & Teasdale, 2015; Hjorth, 2005). For example, despite the widespread adoption of agile methodologies and its principles by software businesses (Conboy et al., 2009), The Alliance, on their website, articulated their motivation in terms of helping 'others in our profession to think about software development, methodologies, and organisations, in new – more agile – ways. If so, we've accomplished our goals' (Highsmith, 2001). This interpretation The Alliance holds of its 'strategic' position is similar to the impressions that most modern 'managerial orders' create. For instance, on first glance, the city planners who built a footbridge to direct pedestrian traffic, and the public sector, which provided political and institutional directives for civil servants to work by, all seem motivated by the need to guide behaviour for a common good, rather than gain control (Sui, 2003; Sundin & Tillmar, 2008). However, beneath these goals, there appears to be an underlying motive by these various 'managerial orders' to govern and rule, by prescribing what they consider to be appropriate behaviours (Dey & Teasdale, 2015).

If The Alliance, operating in the software industry, is a 'strategy' or dominant managerial order, whose principles and values guide how business should be conducted, then those at whom the principles are targeted, assume the position of the 'weak' that de Certeau (1984) identified, and later Hjorth (2004; 2005) used to capture the position entrepreneurs seeking to create new ventures within imposed managerial orders occupy. The 'weak' refers to those whose underprivileged



conditions require a reliance on the provisions of the 'strategy' (de Certeau, 1984). They are often limited in some sense (e.g. resources, authority, language), and hence become subject to 'established managerial orders' reigning in a 'place', which usually has the resources the 'weak' needs (de Certeau & Mayol, 1998; de Certeau, 1984). Compared to the position of power the 'strategy' wields, the 'weak', on first glance, seem to be powerless subjects or victims of the 'strategy'.

My commentary on Episode 4 of The Rise of the Phoenix, reflected in Figure 6.1 by the arrow titled Position of the 'Weak', shows specifically how and why GoTravel occupied the 'weak' position in the environment they operated. In my story, I suggested that within the software industry, software development businesses, particularly small ones such as GoTravel, have been placed in this position of the 'weak' because to remain competitive in their markets, they have to organise their software development processes in ways that align with the principles and values of agile methodologies, stipulated by The Alliance.

Unlike the 'weak' in the original articulation of de Certeau's theory who have to remain under the 'strategies' control (de Certeau, 1984), software businesses may either choose to operate under the governance of The Alliance by aligning their development work with the requirements of agile methodologies, or maintain their use of traditional methodologies, as a minority of businesses are still doing (VersionOne, 2017). However, using agile development methods has gradually become a unique selling proposition for businesses in the industry, such that those who align their development processes with agile methodologies increase their legitimacy and their survival prospects (VersionOne, 2017). As noted in my

discussion of agile methodologies in Chapter 1, for GoTravel, as for many small software businesses, the need to adopt The Alliance's principles and values is even more crucial because agile methodologies are most suited to the small projects they often work on (Conboy et al., 2009).

Furthermore, based on data from the small business, as well as online information regarding the activities of The Alliance, I perceived that GoTravel's 'weak' position was compounded by the implications that following the agile methodology of developing software had on how it organised its development work. In what follows, I describe how adopting agile principles required GoTravel to reorganise its work by lowering boundaries around the software development process (in terms of where it is developed and actors in the development process), in order to work with product users. Within these collaborations, the position of the weak GoTravel occupied was compounded because their control over the development of software was reduced, and they often had to yield to product users' requirements.

At the core of the twelve principles and four values The Alliance launched in their manifesto (Chapter 1) are two identifiable factors that distinguish agile from traditional methodologies; these factors have also aggravated the 'weak' position GoTravel occupies. The first is that during the course of development of a particular functionality or product, agile development processes should be able to embrace changes customers request or insights from previous stages of development (Turk et al., 2014). This is considered to be a response to limitations of the waterfall methodologies that GoTravel previously used, where useful changes to the software

were difficult to make before a full cycle of development had been completed (Glass, 2006). Myke from GoTravel's Quality Assurance department explained how development work was organised at GoTravel under the waterfall methodology:

'The way we work used to be a sort of regimental process in a way, the development is done, they finish we test it but then obviously, you find issues and you go back. Terrible'.

Myke's explanation while identifying the limitations of the waterfall method of software development, also brings to mind arguments against traditional, often bureaucratic, organisational structures that the waterfall methodology was suited to (Nerur et al., 2005).

The second factor is the need for increased interaction between actors, especially between software businesses and customers throughout all stages of development (Annosi et al., 2015). This helps the software business to gather timely changes from customers, which are then incorporated into subsequent stages of development. In fact, the whole idea of agile software development is built on the notion of 'agility', which is 'the ability to efficiently and effectively react to user requirement changes' (Annosi et al., 2015: 4). Thus, in line with agile principles, GoTravel and an increasing number of software development businesses have had to shift the locus of their software development from a firm specific activity to an activity that is shared with product users (Annosi et al., 2015). Essentially, in contrast to the waterfall methodology where product users' role was often limited to providing desired specifications at the start of the development process (Glass, 2006), GoTravel's product users now occupied a more conspicuous role. In effect, the small business had to manage collaborations with product users as a core aspect of their

daily work rather than as a peripheral activity. Indeed, because of the very nature of how work started being organised under the agile methodologies adopted, boundaries of where production, or in this case, 'development' took place became blurred:

Now [in using agile methodologies] it's a bit more fluid, in that, the development is going on and we're testing at the same time, working with our customers bit by bit, so we can find if there's any bugs in the system and it can get fixed quicker. It kind of allows us to get things to the customer quicker as well (Myke, Q.A., GoTravel).

The reasons this new arrangement aggravated GoTravel's 'weak' position include the fact that the small business had to follow product users' specific requirements throughout the stages of developing the software. As Sanda from GoTravel's IT explained, in our interview, 'I mean if a customer says, "do it" [according to the customer specification], they want it done. We can't say "hey, we're gonna do this revolution. You'll see its great'. Bright from the Development Department shared similar views:

'I mean most of the people I look after are mostly doing customer driven work, which is, they've got a specification that's been signed off by the customer and they have to do it according to what the specification says. That doesn't necessarily open the doors to a great deal of creativity [from GoTravel]. Its saying 'you're gonna do it like this' (Bright, Development).

In essence, GoTravel had very little influence on the actual functionalities that were incorporated in the development process. Researchers examining the implications of agile methodologies on management practices within software companies have noted similar problems. In fact, while proponents of agile methodologies suggest that they may offer opportunities for development teams to contribute more creatively to building software (Highsmith, 2001), other researchers have argued that this

argument may be moot, based on mere anecdotal impressions (Annosi et al., 2015; Conboy et al., 2009). Researchers argue that in some cases, such methodologies may even threaten the resources, such as time, development teams need to develop products that are new and useful (Annosi et al., 2015). In addition, following customers' specifications at each stage of development often means that development teams themselves have less latitude in developing functionalities.

In discussing the ways in which the 'managerial order' interacts with the 'weak', de Certeau and Hjørth draw attention to the spatial concept of 'place'. According to the theorists, the 'place', variously referred to as 'ordered place' or 'strategised place' (Hjørth, 2005), is the base from which the 'strategic' manages and enforces its rules (Hjørth, 2004). In the case of GoTravel, this 'place' seemed to have naturally emerged from the agile-inspired collaborations that were present in the industry. Specifically, changes in industry requirements, in the form of new ways of developing software, led to the emergence of a new 'place' – a base for organising software development activities subject to The Alliance's control, within which GoTravel had to operate (Hjørth, 2004). In this sense, The Alliance's 'place' was more fluid, emerging in collaborations between product users and their software providers, and did not seem to take a fixed form like the bank, cathedral or examination hall that various 'strategics', which Hjørth used as illustrations, operate through (Hjørth 2004: 420). In the rest of my discussion, I shall refer to this 'place' – the base for GoTravel's 'interactive and dialogical collaborations with product users' (personal email conversation with Hjørth, 2016) – as a 'shared place'. This is because of the equally conspicuous presence of GoTravel and product users in the 'place' that emerged from The Alliance-inspired collaborations. Though 'shared',

GoTravel remains subject to the authority of product users and The Alliance, in the 'shared place'.

Within this 'shared place', GoTravel became implementers of requests that were dictated by product users. Interestingly, as a result of the internal limitations they experienced, shown as 'Constraints and Tensions' in Figure 6.1, and discussed in Section 6.2 of this chapter, it appears that the small business could not even have been able to engage in relevant actions that would allow them to stay ahead of the specifications customers suggested. Consequently, they had even more reason to rely on the specifications customers requested as a way of developing the software to suit their specific needs.

Developing software to suit specific product user needs, which the agile-inspired collaborations ensured may have enhanced possibilities for customising the software product (Annosi et al., 2015). However, it appeared that this did not lead to benefits that GoTravel and product users required of their software products. Even though product users seemed to have been placed in positions of power and could determine what they wanted in the functionalities, they still expressed concerns over the kind of products they received from GoTravel. As I showed in Episode 2 of The Rise of the Phoenix, even though the organisation was following The Alliance's principles:

'Some product users had raised gentle but strong protests that modifications GoTravel was carrying out on the existing software were not intuitive enough and lacked the responsiveness suited to fast moving trends in their markets' (Episode 2 of the Rise of the Phoenix).

Additionally, even though, as discussed in the previous section, the small business was aware that product users could support them with inputs they needed to revolutionise the products, their 'weak' position within the 'shared place' seemed to restrict the extent to which they could engage in activities to access these inputs, which remained latent.

This means that not only could GoTravel not fully access the inputs their internal limitations necessitated them to search for in order to build competitive software products for their product users, they also remained 'weak' and the underdogs in the 'shared place'.

To sum up my discussions so far, I have described how the Agile Alliance's principles necessitated GoTravel to develop software with more involvement from product users than was previously practiced. The implications of these changes, I have argued, resulted in GoTravel being placed in a position of the 'weak' (de Certeau, 1984). Intuition and popular discourses in the creativity literature, which treat imposing environments such as the 'shared place', as ones that constrain activities that could lead to novelty (Amabile, 1998), may lead us to consider this environment as un conducive for deviation and invention of new practices.

Yet, de Certeau (1984) argues that being placed within this environment often also prompts engagement in actions of resistance, which are inherently creative, as the 'weak' – seeking for ways to survive, tactically reassign the rules of the 'strategy' to other uses, often uses that help achieve plurality and novelty. Specifically, while the weak, under managerial orders appear powerless and subjected;

‘indeed even when they accept [ed] their subjection’, they demonstrate a kind of power, in how they use the rules ‘imposed on them by force or by fascination to ends other than those of their conquerors’ (de Certeau, 1984: 32).

In the rest of my discussion, I follow de Certeau (1984) to advance a similar argument in studying the ‘creative’ creative processes of GoTravel. Specifically, I argue that the small business showed tremendous creativity in how it repurposed the impositions of its ‘managerial orders’ from the industry to other uses, relevant for accomplishing its goals.

While de Certeau and Hjorth suggest that such uses are often aimed at creating ‘spaces’ for play, novelty and plurality, they also observe that the ‘weak’ may as well be motivated to create such ‘spaces’ in order to engage in practices that allow it to gain some victories over the strong or ‘strategies’ (de Certeau, 1984). In the third section of this chapter, I argue that GoTravel’s ‘spaces’ were used by the small business to enhance relationships with product users to access their inputs as well as shift from their position of ‘weak[ness]’ to positions that allowed them ownership over the collaborations that existed under The Alliance’s orders. In fact, it will appear that the small business’ motives for creating ‘spaces’ corresponds with some works done in co-creation, which suggest that organisations may engage in various forms of engagement with product users, under the guise of co-creation in order to enhance their control over the customers (Zwick et al., 2008). In the rest of my discussion, I shall illuminate how GoTravel sought similar opportunities to shift from its ‘weak’ position, even if temporarily, by making new uses out of the ‘orders’ in the their ‘shared place’ – i.e. creating ‘spaces’ for ‘play’.



### 6.3.2 Cracks in the 'Strategy'

Before I move on to discuss the 'use, or rather re-use' (de Certeau, 1984: 30) that the small business made of the orders in the 'shared place', it is worth highlighting one of the paradoxical characteristics of the orders, which enabled GoTravel to repurpose it. According to Sundin & Tillmar (2008), the 'strategic or managerial order' in enforcing its directives through the 'place' may implicitly desire for outcomes that result in improvements and change. However, on its own, the strategic operates through a context that is often not able to provide the needed elements to achieve such a change (Hjorth, 2004). This is because, its goals are often antithetical to activities that support creation of the new. For instance, according to Annosi et al. (2015), agile methodologies, due to their emphasis on working in short sprints in order to send finished parts of the software to the product user, often results in severe time pressure on development teams that may discourage exploring and experimenting activities, that are relevant for building new products.

My findings suggest that GoTravel capitalised on the originally intended motives of their 'shared place' to create opportunities that facilitated engaging in activities of play. Specifically, they used the collaborations with product users, which The Alliance enforced as an entry point to create more opportunities for interactions that were beneficial to developing original software. In Episode 4 of The Rise of The Phoenix, I reported how:

'Felicia believed that the agile way of developing software [through its – emphasis on ongoing face-to-face interactions with product users] offered certain advantages, which GoTravel could capitalise on to develop

imaginative solutions for product users and thereby increase sales (Episode 4, the Rise of the Phoenix).

Similar to Dey and Teasdale's (2015: 5) study, I realised that the small business identified with the core principles of The Alliance, as a 'parasitical engagement' in order to capitalise on product users' presence within the 'shared place' for ends that were to their advantage.

This is also in line with broader arguments that, the 'weak', set against the awareness that the 'strategic' may require actions that lead to change and improvement – but may not be able to provide the required support, in re-appropriating the directives of the 'place', do not totally disregard the ideals and principles of the 'strategic', even if they appear to be antagonistic to plurality and novelty (Brownlie & Hower, 2011; Sundin & Tillmar, 2008). Instead, the 'weak' poaches on gaps, or delicate aspects in the managerial order and seeks ways of reassigning them to other uses. For instance, in their study of entrepreneurship processes in two public sectors, Sundin & Tillmar (2008) found that to create 'spaces' for play in the public institutions they worked, the entrepreneurs they studied tactically made use of the foundational motives and ideas of the New Public Management, under whose established orders they functioned. In the next part of my discussion, I shift attention to the new uses — 'spaces' for 'play' — that GoTravel made out of the conditions in their 'shared place'.

### 6.3.3 'Spaces' for Co-creation, 'Spaces' for leading 'Play' (Episode 4, 5)

In the discussions above, I drew attention to how the small business, having assumed the position of the 'weak', needed to bring inputs relevant for developing

new and improved changes in the software, into a 'shared place' that could not do this on its own, and to gain some advantages that could ameliorate their position of 'weak [ness], even if temporarily (Sundin & Tillmar, 2008; Brownlie & Hower, 2011). I proceed in what follows to closely study the 'spaces' (Figure 6.1 – Green Coloured Space) GoTravel created when they re-appropriated the 'orders' in the 'shared place', arguing that such spaces were creatively used by the small business to increase their potential for accomplishing such goals. de Certeau (1984: 30) suggests that when placed under imposed orders, the 'weak' responds by ruthlessly searching for means of survival. Often, this entails creating:

'for himself a space in which he can find ways of using the constraining order of the place... Without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him, he establishes within it a degree of plurality and creativity'.

In other words, the 'weak' – GoTravel – with no option than to remain within the boundaries of the 'constraining order', creates an opening within it, where it makes new uses of the orders that are present. While in this excerpt, de Certeau conceptualises creativity as something that occurs in the 'spaces' created, I must draw attention again to the fact that elsewhere (Brownlie & Hower, 2011, Perkel, 2007), creativity is also framed in terms of the responses and actions of resisting established 'orders', and creating 'spaces' in their crevices to be used in ways that differ from the 'orders' intended purposes. This makes palpable the nature of different aspects or manifestations of creativity by the 'weak'.

To avoid ambiguity in my articulation of creativity in this discussion, I follow Hjorth to describe the 'spaces' that are created as 'spaces' for 'play' (Hjorth, 2004;

2005). This is because, de Certeau's explanation that the weak 'establishes within it [spaces] a degree of plurality and creativity' may erroneously suggest that the 'weak's creativity is only present in the 'spaces' he creates. On the contrary, I argue in line with others (e.g. Hjorth; 2004; 2005; Brownlie & Hower 2011) that the weak's creativity is evident in the journey from its position of lack, through to creating such spaces to seize opportunities for accomplishing goals of survival. Hjorth describes this as creativity that is manifested in how the entrepreneur 'disturbs the reigning order and, instead, also demands a new organization' (Hjorth 2003: 5). Another reason for prioritising 'play' is that it reflects the exploratory and experimentation nature of activities in the 'spaces' created. Thus, while the 'weak' often creates spaces to engage in activities that can lead to novelty, the 'spaces' themselves are only 'potential sites for reorganising the established and crafting the new (Beyes, 2008: 241), and may not necessarily lead to outcomes that are considered 'creative', – i.e. new and useful, in common parlance of creativity researchers (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). This means that the creation of 'spaces' in 'established orders', and the activities of 'play' the 'weak' organises therein are relevant constructs of creativity primarily because they show 'novel and appropriate ways' the 'weak' accomplishes something (Nayak, 2008: 421).

Going back to my discussion of GoTravel's response to its managerial orders, I perceive from my findings that for the small business to achieve its goals while in the disadvantaged position it occupied, it employed a similar response as the weak in de Certeau and Hjorth's conceptions (Figure 6.1). GoTravel 'creatively' negotiated, and created 'spaces for play' within the agile-inspired collaborations. I

use 'spaces' here in line with Agamben's (1999 cited in Hjorth 2004: 418) interpretation of the concept, as 'a period in time when a possibility to actualise (often materialise) an imagined creation is practiced in concrete social relations (such as conversations)'. In this sense, GoTravel created snippets of opportune periods or moments (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006), within The Alliance-inspired collaborations to encourage 'conversations' (actions, activities of play) that were useful for the small businesses' goals.

An interesting fact of the 'spaces' GoTravel negotiated relates to actors who were engaged in its intended activities of 'play'. Due to de Certeau (1984) and in fact Hjorth's (2004; 2005) resolute motive of developing an understanding of ways 'tactics' operate, they did not concern themselves much with actors in the 'spaces' tactics or the 'weak' create, except to explain that the 'weak' tactically creates openings, or 'spaces' to engage in actions that help them survive. In fact, a reading of de Certeau's works seems to suggest that the 'weak' is a lone actor, who subject to the orders of the place, uses their own devices to negotiate an opening that benefits their survival.

However, according to the entrepreneurship literature whose insights I draw on to study GoTravel's creative processes, entrepreneurs often draw on the support of their networks in response to their own vulnerabilities when attempting to develop new ventures (Leyden & Link, 2015). In recent works on creativity studies, Hjorth et al. (2015: 1) lent support to this view, suggesting the need to pay attention to collective creativity, that is creativity that emerges 'in-between people', rather than 'what is in people'. Against this vantage background, I argue that in the spaces

GoTravel created, the small business, as well as their product users were both actors. Interestingly, I argue in this section that the dynamics of the 'shared place', relating to who was strong or weak, changed in the 'spaces', as GoTravel led activities of 'play' that seemed to shift their position from the 'weak' to the powerful.

To elaborate on how GoTravel managed the 'spaces' they created in order to generate inputs for newer and more competitive products, as well as (temporarily) shift from their weak position in the 'shared place', I draw on research done in networks, and co-creation of value. Networking has been noted as fundamental to entrepreneurial processes, as it offers entrepreneurs opportunities to access inputs they do not have for new ventures they want to create (Mainela & Puhakka, 2009). When enterprises network with other stakeholders, they often create opportunities to co-create in ways that offer opportunities for innovation (Kristensson et al., 2008). For small businesses such as GoTravel that face limitations in their organisations and are vulnerable to external factors, co-creation can be a useful strategy for building their own innovation capabilities and processes (Frow et al., 2015). While the bulk of the literature on co-creation has conceptualised it as an effective means of empowering customers in the value that is created (O'hern & Rindfleisch, 2010), I situate my discussion here alongside works done that illuminate the opportunistic ideologies that may motivate organisations in initiating co-creation with their customers (Bonsu & Darmody, 2008; Cova et al., 2011). In fact, among the latter group, co-creation has been similarly recognised as a 'play' (Hjorth, 2005; 2005) strategy by organisations, in terms of:

‘experimenting with new possibilities for value creation that are based on the expropriation of free cultural, technological, social, and affective labour of the consumer masses’ (Zwick et al., 2008).

In my discussions, I make the resonance of this perspective with the intended motives of the ‘weak’ clear by shedding light on the clandestine, but yet calculated nature of GoTravel’s ‘play’ in its ‘spaces’.

First, in Table 6.2, I adapt Frow et al.’s (2015) co-creation framework to highlight the main dimensions and categories that made up GoTravel’s co-creation activities, reported in Episode 4 and 5 of the Rise of the Phoenix. To make palpable my discussion of the ways GoTravel engaged in co-creation as ‘play’ as part of its creative processes, I focus my elaboration on the motive of the small business’ co-creation, the forms of co-creation and the engagement platforms that the business used. I have already introduced the engaging actor (Product Users). The other dimensions, level of engagement (cognitive and behavioural) and duration of engagement (ongoing) emerge naturally from my discussion.

Table 6.2: GoTravel’s Co-Creation Design

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Dimensions</b>				
	<b><i>Co-Creative Motive</i></b>	<b><i>Engagement Platform</i></b>	<b><i>Co-creative form</i></b>	<b><i>Engaging actor</i></b>	<b><i>Duration of engagement</i></b>
	Build own competencies/ameliorate position of the ‘weak’	Physical resources, spaces/events. E.g. Community Centre Events	Co-conception of Ideas	Product users	Ongoing
	Access to inputs	Personnel Groups in the form of the support team	Co-pricing		
		Virtual Sharing	Co-autonomy		

#### 6.3.4 Motives of Co-Creation

In previous parts of this discussion chapter, I briefly mentioned core motives that underlie GoTravel's creation of 'spaces' in its shared place. However, I consider it necessary to briefly expand on them here, as they guided the nature of interactions GoTravel led in the 'spaces'. As noted, at a general level, the weak creates spaces in the managerial orders' place to indulge in activities of play/invention (Hjorth, 2005). In my discussion, I show how traditional meanings of play as unserious activity (Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006) was reframed in the context of GoTravel's created spaces. Specifically, I argue that GoTravel's business activities with product users were re-appropriated into a 'playful' practice to unearth and access relevant resources that had benefits for future creation (Hjorth, 2005). In what follows, I discuss three specific motives that guided how and what kinds of play the small business engaged in.

According to Leyden & Link (2015), aware of their limitations, entrepreneurs engage with their networks in search for a combination of inputs – often knowledge, actions and resources that are expected to contribute to developing the innovation they desire. In a similar way, I argue that GoTravel assuming an entrepreneurial persona, was aware of the limitations and cost of supporting the development of creative products in-house, and hence, used their 'spaces' to seek resources (such as time and money) they lacked. Beyond this, the small business sought for product users' participation in co-creation that would help address the consequences of the structural constraints they experienced partly as a result of their company's growth (Episode 2, Rise of the Phoenix). For example, unlike employees at GoTravel whose



autonomy may have been undermined by leadership and time constraints, product users seemed to have more freedom (and/or autonomy) to think of new functionalities and conceptualise competitive new products in their daily use of GoTravel's products. By participating in GoTravel's co-creations, product users rendered their knowledge of ways to improve the software product (I shall elaborate on this in the final part of the chapter).

The fact that the openings (Brownlie & Hewer, 2008) or 'spaces' GoTravel created were fashioned to reuse the principles of the 'shared place', that is, the collaborations between themselves and product users reflects a sort of cross-appropriation by GoTravel. Cross-appropriation is an action of the entrepreneur to bring practices into their 'own' domain and repurpose them into fertile opportunities that may lead to novelty (Spinoza et al, 1999). In this sense, cross – appropriation, a tactical action, makes it possible for the 'weak', to bring elements for desired future creation into the spaces they create, which the contexts, GoTravel's 'shared place' in the case of my research, could not generate on its own.

To further highlight GoTravel's tactical behaviour related to this motive, it is interesting to note the different extents of value GoTravel, in orchestrating its 'play' activities, placed on various product users, an act Lange (2011) refers to as subtle inclusion (or exclusion) strategy of entrepreneurial processes. This refers to how product users, depending on their potential to contribute 'resources' to the spaces, were targeted as worthy (or less so) 'players' within the site of creative action. Suprana from GoTravel's Support Team gave an example:

'The customer requirements; they are always ongoing. The bigger the fish, the more money they have, the more they influence what we do. A major company like ABC Travel, they're a multi-national organisation that thinks very differently to us. They have to think about the bigger scheme like how do I get the U.K to talk to South Africa, and Asia?

While:

'There's smaller involvement especially with new customers. They do much low-level sponsoring of development. They say, "I like what you do but we really need these five things put in place before we can actually purchase it." And coming to an agreement with them, it will mean those five things will have to get done. So again, the creativity comes from them, although much more on a smaller scale which is minimal'.

Suprana's example highlights an interesting tactic of the 'weak' as they engage in selective means to organise resources towards desired outcomes, in this case, outcomes relevant for developing creative products.

The second motive that guided GoTravel's actions in their shared place relates to ameliorating the implications of GoTravel's weak position in their 'shared place', a motive I describe in Figure 6.1, as one for empowering itself. As discussed in section two of this chapter, developing software according to the guidelines of The Alliance placed GoTravel in a position where the bulk of their activities, especially those relating to software development, were dictated by industry standards and product users' requirements. However, as shown in *The Rise of the Phoenix*, this was the very sphere Felicia (Head of Sales and Marketing), targeted as an opportunity to build more competitive products, and by so doing, build a strong external profile for the organisation.

I argue that the small business-led co-creation in the ‘spaces’ were an opportunistic and astute response to their own disadvantaged position in the ‘shared place’, where they sought to reduce the implications of the position of the weak they occupied and perhaps, to even, clandestinely, conquer their conquerors — i.e. ‘orders’ of The Alliance and product users. Thus, although GoTravel’s spaces may seem to have crafted product users’ roles in co-creation as influential, I suggest that GoTravel pursued this creative action of accessing inputs relevant for building novel products from their product users to become lead actors in a ‘place’ that seemed to have been appropriated by The Alliance and product users.

In fact, work done by critical co-creation theorists suggest that even though product users are often made to feel that their role in co-creation activities empowers them, this is merely an illusion (Bonsu & Darmody, 2008). Where organisations parade co-creation as attempts to partner with their customers in ‘mutually beneficial innovation and production processes’, they may be actually motivated by the desire to attain ‘a strategic institutionalisation of control over consumers and markets’ (Cova et al., 2011: 232). de Certeau (1984: xix) described this motive that underlies creative and tactical ways by which the ‘weak’ operates as attaining ‘victories [of the weak] over the strong’ (whether the strength be that of powerful people or the violence of things or of an imposed order, etc.)’.

The conversations among GoTravel’s product users in Episode 5 of The Rise of the Phoenix showed how product users seemed aware of this motive, but were reluctant to leave the ‘partnership’ they shared with their software provider. Among the reasons they shared, included how they had incurred sunk costs, which made it

unwise to leave. All four product users (Rick, Adele, Alexandria and Samuel) spoke of substantial amounts of money and long waiting times their organisations had invested for modifications to be made or add-ons to be included in their basic product. Indeed, they felt that they had been working to 'improve GoTravel's system at their own expense' (Rick, Neptune Limited). Such investments deterred them from switching to other software providers 'because maybe they are too costly and to start reinventing the wheel again- it can be more trouble's worth' (Rick, Neptune Limited). Closely related to this was the fact that product users felt that they were a part of the small business's work activities and thus leaving, rather than lending their support, would mean a failure of the product that they needed. This perception could also be explained by their role in the agile way of developing and designing software, which made them feel partly responsible for the performance, design and development of the product GoTravel offers (Kristenson et al., 2004). In this sense, the intricate relationship they had developed with GoTravel made them reluctant to leave.

Thus, while initially, in the 'shared place' GoTravel seemed to be 'submissive, and even consenting to their subjection' (de Certeau, 1984: xiii), in the openings they created, they were enabled by product users' reluctance to switch to other software providers, to become powerful. As noted, such shifts in power that the 'weak' orchestrates are not epochal (Dey & Teasdale, 2015). In Figure 6.1, the dashed arrow reflects the temporary nature of the power that the 'weak' gains in their 'spaces'.

A third motive I identify relates closely to the previous. This has to do with engaging in co-creation to build its own competencies as a small-constrained

business. Some of GoTravel's engagement platforms (Frow et al., 2015), which I discuss in the next section were aimed at positioning GoTravel's employees to build their own capabilities on ways to develop the product further. In Episode 4 of The Rise of the Phoenix, GoTravel's Sales and Marketing Head, Felicia, noted that one problem that seemed to restrict the small business' internal ability to develop creative products for product users was that employees sometimes 'forget about what the customer's motivation is'. Forgetting about their customers' motivation may have been partly caused by the time pressure employees experienced, as well as the need to get functionalities quickly to product users. Thus, Felicia led The Community Centre programme where product users visited GoTravel to share their experiences of using the product to GoTravel's employees as part of 'working in and out to get people to think about the customer' (Felicia, Sales and Marketing, GoTravel). The interactions that characterised this programme partly compensated for the time pressure employees experienced as it allowed them to engage in creative activities such as conceiving and reconceptualising the problems of products users by temporally occupying their space. According to Felicia, this programme served as a creative stimulus for employees to be able to conceptualise expectations and needs of clients:

'I think also, so like yesterday, at the company meeting we had a customer coming to the company meeting and tell us what it is like to be a GoTravel customer; it's kind of disruptive stimulus to actually get people (employees) to think like about, 'wow, I didn't realise that's what your world is like and when we deliver a crappy release, this is what it means to you'.

Taken together, the three motives that guided the small business' actions in their 'spaces' reflects the tactical ways of operating that de Certeau (1984) drew attention

to. In the next part of my discussions in this section, I move a step further to identify the engagement platforms that GoTravel used in the spaces they created to engage more with product users.

### 6.3.5 Engagement Platforms

On the basis of the vantage foundation of collaborations that the Agile Alliance had resulted in, GoTravel created spaces, which were used as creative 'moments' (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006) to create opportunities for increased interactions with their product users. Within such spaces, GoTravel used a number of engagement platforms (Ramaswamy and Gouillart, 2010) to engage more closely with product users in ways that improved possibilities of addressing their motives. Engagement platforms are resources created by lead actors in co-creation processes, GoTravel in the case of my research, to be used as a site for successful resource-sharing among actors (Frow et al., 2015).

From my findings, I identify three engagement platforms that GoTravel used in the spaces created two of them identified by Frow et al. (2015). All three were formed by capitalising on the collaborations that already existed between the small business and product users (Section 6.3.2). This means that access points and collaborations with product users, already present through the orders of the Agile Alliance, were made more relevant and specific to sourcing for relevant inputs the business needed to build competitive and innovative software.

First, GoTravel re-trained their Support Team (referred to as personnel and call centre teams by Frow et al., 2015) to increase their resourcefulness to product

users, and by so doing increased engagement between the organisation and product users. Within GoTravel, the Support Team is at the frontline of communicating with product users. This means that they respond to routine telephone calls and emails from product users and provide advice on customer problems that do not need to be escalated to the development team. To be used as an engagement platform, GoTravel equipped the support team and business analysts' team to engage in relevant interactions that could elicit suggestions and ideas from product users when they contacted GoTravel for tailored solutions. In the second week of my internship for instance, new employees joined the support team. In addition, and as observed in *The Rise of the Phoenix*, the Support Team was one of the few departments that had been sent off for the off-site retreats the organisation had started organising to provide a site away from the busy work environment. Hans explained that this was because communicating among employees in the department was becoming more difficult:

The problem with our world for example is that we don't have enough communication. So, we are actually being very creative, probably for the last six months especially; where we've gone and taken them [Support Team] out of the building for a day to talk to them about things.

Given the efforts that were put into the support team, it was not surprising when Product User, Adele from TnT Company Limited noted that the Support Team seemed much more prepared to respond to telephone calls from product users, and talk them through possible courses of actions when there were bugs [faults] in the system.

According to Felicia (Sales and Marketing Head, GoTravel), however, engagement platforms that occur through telephone or email communication, such as the support team does with product users, can make it 'easy to be a bit dismissive of customers...but when you meet someone, they're a person, and they actually come alive' (Episode 4, The Rise of the Phoenix). Thus, GoTravel set up other engagement platforms that offered more opportunities for face-to-face interactions in order to engage more intimately with product users. In addition to the face-to-face interactions that The Alliance required as part of agile methodologies of developing software, others in the form of physical resources, events and spaces (Frow et al., 2015) offered GoTravel the advantage of gaining access to latent resources from product users that remained 'uncodified, socially situated, and organisationally embedded' which I suggest in my thesis was the form the resources were in (Operti & Carnabuci, 2014 :1043).

The engagement platforms in the form of face-to-face interactions to access the inputs GoTravel needed from product users took place in a number of ways that GoTravel, acting as a 'creative engine' (Sundin & Tillmar, 2008) instituted. Some of these platforms were listed on GoTravel's website as ways they continuously showed their willingness to listen and engage with their product user. First, representatives from GoTravel, usually Felicia, Jack, Fabrizio and representatives from the Business Analysts team, visited the work places of product users to monitor and discuss product performance. This was usually an opportunity for product users to share their ideas on how the product could be developed to meet their specific needs. Product User, Adele, explained in one of our interviews that these visits had



provided opportunities for product users, like her company, to share their knowledge of the industry and ideas on how GoTravel could best respond to their needs. Relatedly, GoTravel organised quarterly events where a number of users from organisations in the accommodation sector, using the small business' software products, met representatives from the small business to deliberate on product development that could meet emerging needs in their markets.

Another kind of engagement platform that enabled face-to-face interactions was in the form of the 'Community Centre' programme, which had just started at the time I was interning with GoTravel. This programme, as discussed, took place as part of the monthly company-wide meetings and involved inviting a product user to share their experiences of using GoTravel's products to employees. Felicia explained what this meeting was for:

so yesterday, at the company meeting, you know, we had a customer, first time we had a customer coming to the company meeting and tell us what it is like to be a GoTravel customer; it's kind of disruptive stimulus to actually get people to think like about "wow, I didn't realise that's what your world is like and when we deliver a bubby release, this is what it means to you

In Episode 5 of the Rise of The Phoenix, product users explained that this initiative generated a feeling of being heard and being taken seriously by GoTravel, regarding their needs for bespoke and competitive products.

In addition, there were one-off measures, such as participating in Trade Shows, which gave the small business further opportunities to meet both current and potential product users to engage in chats that led to a better understanding of what their needs were as product users.

A final engagement platform that GoTravel used in its spaces is what I call virtual product-sharing. Virtual product-sharing is based on a 'whole concept (by GoTravel) of whatever we do for one person is available to all' (Hans, Head of Support, GoTravel). This means that products, which one user suggests or requests and pays for is made available to all other users of the basic product. For instance, according to press information on the travel website I accessed, when Rick's company sponsored the on-demand data reporting facilities, it was made available to all travel management companies GoTravel caters for.

Product users and GoTravel shared different views on this platform. For instance, while Felicia (Sales and Marketing Head), described it to the press as a great example of product users and their providers partnering for the benefit of the end user (customers of product users), Samuel did not sound pleased with this practice, which appeared common was the fact that:

'What is created and rolled out and every product user gets access to it. So, if you're paying for it, it doesn't feel great because you're paying for it and everybody gets access'.

As reflected in Alexandria, Rick, Adele and Samuel's accounts, most of the features sold as add-ons to their product came about because of modifications that were requested by other clients. In fact, from our interviews, as well as press information on GoTravel's activities, I found that such creative-idea sharing is a widespread 'play' practice in the interactive spaces GoTravel shares with its product users.

While these contested views seemed to prevail among the small business and their product users, my aim in highlighting them here is to show how, on this

platform, GoTravel's product users make up what may be considered a virtual team engaging in constant exchange of ideas on how to make a product common to their business better. As product users build on each other's ideas through making different requests to enhance a common product, they behave similarly to open-source communities and became an important element for successful development of creative products (Chesbrough, 2006).

The examples above, of the engagement platforms that the small business used, illustrates progressive steps GoTravel put in place to create spaces of creative action by tightening relationships between themselves and product users in ways that increased GoTravel's chances of gaining their [product users] support and accessing relevant inputs for creating new value for product users.

In the final section of my discussions, I move on to describe the forms of co-creation that GoTravel engaged in within their spaces. Again, I must note that my motive for discussing GoTravel's co-creation dimensions is to further an understanding of their creativity, partly manifested in how they creatively negotiated their imposed orders and created spaces for such activities of 'play' (Perkel, 2007).

#### 6.3.6 Forms of Co-Creation GoTravel – The Games GoTravel Plays

In this section, I use illustrations from my story to construct an image of three specific forms of co-creation that GoTravel's play activities were used to achieve.

#### 6.3.6.1 Co-Conception of Ideas / Accessing Knowledge and New Ideas

Knowledge is one of the most important resources for creativity (Chapter 2). Scholars consider that an individual's knowledge of a domain is important to make a novel and useful departure from the domain (Sternberg, 2012, Amabile & Pratt, 2016, Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). In the social network literature, access to knowledge remains one of the main reasons for which small businesses seek networking opportunities with others in their external environment (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005). I found the quest to access product users' knowledge of their industries to be an important component in the activity of play GoTravel orchestrated.

All four product users who took part in my research, as demonstrated in their narratives (Episode 5, the rise of the Phoenix) manifested excellent knowledge of the accommodation industry and its trends. They knew their company requirements first-hand and how the software they required from GoTravel could help address those needs. Not surprisingly, in our interviews, they were quick to identify opportunities for developing the software product and services received from GoTravel further. Samuel (5 Star Ltd) explained how his company does this:

'When we do meet them [GoTravel], we talk about our customers and what they want and what they do. I guess what we think we need for our customers. We'll go to them and say 'we need the system to do this. We'll say, our customers are tending to buy this sort of product or they are behaving in that way'.

Samuel's example shows how product users may contribute to GoTravel's creative processes through their domain knowledge (Amabile, 2012). For example, suggestions that emerged from their knowledge of the accommodation market,

which they shared formed a pool of ideas for further development by their software provider, GoTravel. In fact, for Rick (Neptune Limited), the domain knowledge product users have could even be considered the main driver of building creative products by GoTravel. 'I feel that sometimes, the creativity comes about because it's a need in the business. So yeah, that is more driven by us...it is more by us' (Rick, Neptune Limited).

GoTravel's 'play' activities here, in the form of co-conception of ideas, seem to have also centred on opportunities to seek as many ideas as they could from product users in the form of requests, complaints and challenges from product users. Samuel, from 5-Star Ltd, whose company had recently found ways to streamline the number of its employees contacting GoTravel with problems they identified while using the software noted that:

'Initially [GoTravel wanted our staff to contact them directly with challenges in using the software], you know. Because they wanted lots of feedback coming in. When we had twenty people having the same issue it could be that five people will all talk to GoTravel. Things are more controlled now. They all report internally and one of our guys will then go and work it with GoTravel'.

According to Samuel, they had had to reduce the number of their employees directly contacting GoTravel with problems and instead, elect one employee to take charge of such interactions. However, even with one employee in charge, it was apparent that GoTravel had access to a wide variety of problems, which they could work back from to improve the functionalities they offered to product users.

#### 6.3.6.2 Co- Pricing - Play to Access Sponsorship (Funding)

Extant literature on small business performance suggest that small businesses are mostly constrained when it comes to financial resources needed to engage in actions that can support building novel ideas (Berends et al., 2014). Thus, another important form of co-creation within the 'spaces' was playing to access financial resources, co-pricing in Frow et al.'s (2015) description.

The bulk of responsibility of funding most ideas realised in these 'spaces' fell on product users. As I identified through Rick, Adele, Samuel and Alexandria's conversations in Episode 5 of the rise of the Phoenix, their companies had regularly paid huge amounts to GoTravel to develop products to suit changing needs of their own accommodation customers. 'We've had to spend quiet a lot of money to get the contracts up to a stage where it is more workable' (Alexandria, Crawling Limited). While product users seemed to have resigned themselves to this role within the 'spaces' of creative action, it appeared they would have preferred not to. In fact, often, they felt this aspect of GoTravel's 'play' was being orchestrated by the business to develop the software product at their expense (Rick, Neptune Limited). And even though it appeared that they would have preferred this form of co-creation to change and see GoTravel say:

We understand your business, we understand your industry and we see that these things could actually benefit your business, we know what size of business you have, we know what kind of clients you have, we feel this could actually enhance what you do' (Rick, Neptune, Limited).

It did not appear that product users' sponsorship would end soon because GoTravel, like many small businesses, was operating as 'quite a lean company in terms of

resources' (Samuel, 5 Star Limited) (Berends et al., 2014). For this reason, it appeared that the small business needed to continue with activities where they 'develop their system and somebody else pays for the development' (Samuel, 5 Star Limited). This is in line with perceptions some critical co-creation researchers hold of co-creation, where they observe that such activities may be done at the expense of product users (Cova et al., 2011).

#### 6.3.6.3 Co-Autonomy - Play to Secure Autonomy (and Time)

The relative paucity of time and autonomy to conceive new ideas and experiment with them within GoTravel (Figure 6.1) made opportunities to access these central to the activities of 'play' in the small business' 'spaces'. Based on my findings, I identify two main ways product users time and autonomy were made available. First of all, product users' ongoing use of GoTravel's products for various purposes, including as an online platform for travel transactions, booking travel related products for their own customers, and streamlining sales activities, often led product users to naturally create time to reflect on the product's performance, identify lapses and conceive possible, or alternative ways of resolving the lapses. In this way, product users did not need to create specialised time to come up with ideas for developing the product further as these were practiced naturally in their daily use of the software. For example, in Chapter 5, Episode 5, product users shared how they had had to keep contacting GoTravel to report bugs (faults) in the system. For Product User Samuel, his company went beyond this to actually test the products they received from GoTravel, and by so doing created deliberate time to contribute to better products. He explained how his company had 'learnt a lesson', which was

to test the product in their organisation and contact GoTravel with any problems they encountered prior to rolling it out (Episode 5, The Rise of the Phoenix).

In terms of autonomy to conceive of new ways of developing the product, it appears that product users were more advantaged compared to GoTravel's employees because they did not work under leadership pressures within GoTravel. In other words, they had the freedom to engage in personal thoughts that could be of relevance to imaginative ways of developing their software.

In sum, GoTravel instituted a number of useful forms of co-creation in the openings they created, which seems beneficial for accessing the inputs they needed for building novel and competitive products, as well ameliorating the position of the weak they occupied. An important observation to make in illuminating the creativity inherent in such activities of 'play' is how similar the interactions between GoTravel and product users are to the social interactions Hargadon and Bechky (2006) proposed to explain collective creativity. Particularly, GoTravel's processes of eliciting for ideas and other resources can be described as a help-seeking interaction, while product users' responses reflect the help-giving interaction that occurs during collective creative activities (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006).

Finally, while I have only reported snapshots of these activities, they are far from static or one-off activities. This is primarily because software sold to external users usually require regular updates and modifications to suit emerging and changing needs. As a result, co-creating with product users may be engaged in as a continuous activity to maintain access to relevant inputs.



## 6.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed creative ways a small software business used to accomplish goals that were potentially relevant to building new and useful software. The discussion started from my observation of limitations the small business encountered in its own organisation, and advanced to analyse two main resulting issues that featured in its processes used to build new and improved software. Using the spatial concepts proposed by Hjorth (2004, 2005, 2007) in his study of entrepreneurship processes, I demonstrated that for GoTravel, and perhaps many small businesses, creativity entails processes of diverting impositions of managerial orders or established orders into new uses, by making them into 'spaces' for 'play'. Second, based on my data and literature on co-creation, which suggest that innovation and creativity processes in small businesses are relatively more reliant on external sources, I argued that the 'play' activities, in the form of co-creation were organised within their 'spaces', in order to access relevant resources to build original and improved software products.

Based on these two points, my argument has contextualised small businesses' creative processes beyond straightforward, variance based approaches that consider small businesses as creative merely because of assumptions that they may have work environments that naturally support employee engagement in exploratory activities and subsequently, organisational creativity (Amabile & Pratt, 2016, Dhillon et al., 2009). Specifically, I have challenged such representations using my story and discussions, arguing that in fact, GoTravel had both resource and behavioural constraints that may have been inimical to employee creativity

(Section 6.2). However, they negotiated these constraints towards relative empowerment by allowing them to guide and provoke alternative ways of facilitating activities relevant for building new solutions.

Importantly, the linearity, stability and predictability that characterise the creative process presented in Chapter 2 are missing from my conceptualisation of GoTravel's creative processes. My discussions suggest that even though small businesses creative processes may be deliberately organised, they are often unpredictable in the ways they unfold overtime, and are made up of a number of complex and dynamic interactions that are not sufficiently captured in Amabile's (1988, 2016) conceptualisation of the creative process. The processes I have discussed here go beyond cognitive activities of individuals in organisations to include collective interactions among a host of relevant actors in and out of the small business, such as product users.

By shifting attention from individual - level processes to organisational - level processes as I have done, my research enables a reconsideration of the ways researchers have regarded certain factors raised in support of our knowledge of organisational creativity. For instance, while contextual factors within organisations may limit individual creativity (Amabile, 1996), my findings and discussions suggest that they may also facilitate creative processes at the level of the organisation by signalling or directing how and where activities relevant for building original and inventive solutions should be organised (Rosso, 2014; Fortwengel, et al., 2017).

Furthermore, I may be said to have conceptualised GoTravel (and their creative processes) in terms of an entrepreneurial 'persona' who created 'spaces'

or, in entrepreneurship research parlance, 'opportunities' to facilitate imagination and invention of new practices, within their 'shared place'. Indeed, borrowing from the entrepreneurship literature, particularly Hjorth's (2004, 2007, 2005) work, has provided interesting insights to illuminate my view of the nature and processes of creativity among small businesses in ways that may not have been apparent by solely dwelling on the creativity literature. I consider two specific ways my understanding of organisational creativity described above have benefited from entrepreneurship studies.

First, entrepreneurship describes a process of pursuing opportunities to create new ventures, regardless of the resources the entrepreneur controls (Mainela & Puhakka, 2009; Mainela & Puhakka, 2011). This view is useful for thinking through how GoTravel, despite its internal limitations, was able to draw on creative ways to increase their potential of meeting product user needs. My second point is the emphasis in entrepreneurship studies on the need for networks in facilitating entrepreneurial processes. Here, scholars suggest that entrepreneurs' networks can contain many opportunities that entrepreneurs seek (Mainela & Puhakka, 2011). In the same way, GoTravel's creative processes seems to reflect a unique set of entrepreneurial skills that the small business used to draw product users - and their inputs - into 'spaces' where activities of 'play' towards future creation and improvement in the software product could be facilitated.

Secondly, I found the concepts of 'place' and 'space' to be sensitive to certain overlooked aspects of organisations' creative processes. By using these concepts, 'place' to describe the site of interaction between small businesses and their product

users, and 'spaces' to describe the opportunities that are created to ensure access to resources and interactions that are relevant to building new ideas, I may have expanded the vocabulary available to study, analyse and develop an understanding of organisational creativity in the context of small businesses. The language used to describe a phenomenon, as noted in my discussion of literature, has significant implications for building theory about it by providing 'windows for seeing what was earlier hidden or missing' (Gartner, 1993: 238) and developing reasonable findings that enable practical dialogues with practitioners (Hjorth, 2007). In this sense, Glăveanu (2013: 74) has maintained the need for creativity researchers to be particularly deliberate in:

'Expanding our language and consequently our thinking about the phenomenon, to do justice to its true complexity and relational nature, and be able, ultimately, to understand and cultivate creativity in a variety of domains'.

By using Hjorth's (2004, 2007) works, I offer a description of how creative processes unfold in the context of small businesses, using descriptions such as creating 'spaces' for play and/or invention and re-appropriating 'places' to expand understanding of creativity beyond what social psychology researchers have established straightforwardly as an employee ability to develop new and useful ideas. In essence, borrowing from the entrepreneurship literature has offered thinking and language tools to help conceptualise creativity in a sense that had previously not been obvious in existing creativity literature.

Moving on from the concepts I have used to advance my argument, an important point I make based on my discussions is that organisational creativity is a context-specific phenomenon that is embedded both in a particular time and place.

As discussed in the chapter, GoTravel's creative processes were provoked by a number of factors including its internal constraints and changes in how software is developed, which together placed the business in a 'weak' position. For instance, changing requirements in ways of developing software required GoTravel to work more closely with product users, and subsequently, led to a shift in where and how creative actions should be enacted by GoTravel (De Souza e Silva & Hjorth, 2009). In other words, the resources required to develop software the agile way were no longer limited to GoTravel, their employees or leaders but now had to be sourced from product users 'outside' the small business. In this sense, the introduction of the agile way of developing software, which required close collaborations with product users in development tasks, determined the ways GoTravel created opportunities for building improved and original creative products at the time of my data collection.

Regarding the conclusions I have drawn from my research, this context specificity of creative processes draws attention to the fact that the processes of creativity I have discussed in the foregoing may only reflect the case of small software businesses engaged in developing products for external users. In other organisations where for instance, software is developed solely for in-house activities, different processes and actors may be required towards building imaginative products. The overarching implication of this view therefore seems to be a need for creativity researchers to acknowledge how context and wider societal influences shape the ways in which creativity is defined and managed in different organisational contexts (Banks et al., 2002).

Turning my attention now to alternative discussions that may emerge from my findings, and hence the arguments I have made in this chapter, some may dismiss the role I have attributed to the agile methodology of developing software in GoTravel's creative processes. This may especially be in terms of how I have suggested that it enhanced collaborations with product users as a result of the need to work together in various cycles of software development. Some may argue that small businesses usually work in close proximity to customers and thus they would have an advantage of interacting with product users anyway. However, there is research to suggest that the agile method of software development has an intrinsic advantage in enforcing relationships between developers and product users, for instance through its emphasis on 'customer collaboration over contract negotiation' (Agile Alliance, 2018). On this basis, the relevance of the agile method of developing software on GoTravel's creative processes cannot be dismissed.

I have consciously not paid attention to the nature of outcomes of GoTravel's creative processes. This is partly due to my commitment in this research to contribute to shifting attention from established understandings of creativity purely in terms of outcomes (Blomberg, 2014; Fortwengel et al., 2017). While the bulk of creativity research focuses on desired outcomes of the creative process, namely, new and useful ideas (Amabile & Pratt, 2016, Berg et al., 2015), the processes that characterised GoTravel's creativity, which I have discussed in the chapter may not always lead to such outcomes. Rather, they are fertile opportunities for product users and the small business to engage in social interactions that support experimentation and exploration, and hence possibly, inventive outcomes.

Although I did not aim to discuss the outcomes of the processes I discussed, I consider it important to reflect briefly on how GoTravel's approach to their creative processes may affect their ability to develop radical products that could potentially transform their market. Relying on product users' inputs, especially ideas and knowledge, to develop the software product is likely to lead to only incremental changes in the software. This is a general problem with customer focused firms as they often develop products based on current customer behaviours and needs (Zortea-Johnston et al., 2012). As Samuel from 5 Star explained:

'Often, all we're talking about are things that I need them to do today or I might need in three months or six months' time...for agents, we come up with very simple needs'.

For GoTravel's product users, their immediate and usually simple needs, may form the bulk of knowledge from which they make requests and suggestions for developing the existing software. In this sense, ideas which are beyond their current needs but have potential to revolutionise their industries may be overlooked. In addition, product users may be unwilling to fund and support ideas which appear too radical. This is because, they may consider it a risk to their budgets if the ideas fail or lead to problems in their existing software (Baer, 2012). For these reasons, small businesses such as GoTravel, while using tactical means to engage with product users in order to develop their products, may also need to increase efforts at building creative products in ways that do not always rely on their product users. Such efforts may allow them to predict future demands and proactively develop products that meet those demands. As Rick seemed to advice:

'I'm looking at someone (a software company) looking into our future and saying, this is where we see your system going and this is how it will affect your business in the future. That is creative thinking...and creative forward thinking...but yes, coming up with ideas that will solve problems for us as a travel business in the future' (Rick, Neptune Ltd).

Finally, my discussions here have been focused on building novel and competitive software for product users. This focus has shaped the line of my discussions as I have purposefully not commented on other ways GoTravel, or other small businesses for that matter, can engage in building new and useful ideas. Taking this view, I may have overlooked internal efforts at developing new and useful ideas to solve the company's own problems such as improving development processes or new ways of marketing. When it comes to these, GoTravel may rely on its employees and leadership and less on the creative processes. In addition, after ideas are generated and paid for, GoTravel will usually follow up with further activities on how to develop those ideas in the best possible ways for product users. Both points to alternative ways by which businesses can exhibit organisational creativity. However, given that the small business is engaged in customer-driven work, I considered that this aspect of their creative processes offers the most promise for learning about creativity by small businesses. In addition, given my social constructionist stance (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2009), my research focus on creative processes, evidenced through software development processes, draws attention to the multiple realities that are possible for researchers seeking to understand the complex phenomenon of creativity by organisations.

Now that I have presented discussions underlying my view of creative processes of small software businesses, I move on to the final chapter of my thesis



where I provide answers to my research questions, highlight my overall contributions to creativity research and practice. I also identify the limitations of my research in the next chapter.

## 7 CONCLUSION

### 7.1 Introduction

In my research, I sought to offer new and relevant ways of learning about the nature and processes of creativity among small software businesses. This was not only to achieve theoretical plurality, though that is currently of essence to the research field (Blomberg, 2014). Instead I sought to develop a situated understanding of organisational creativity that offers relevant advice to practitioners seeking guidance on how they can create opportunities to develop new and improved solutions in the midst of their, usually, paradoxical organisational realities (Bailey et al., 2009).

I have made two main claims based on my research findings. The first is that for the small software business I studied, and perhaps for many similar small businesses with resource and behavioural constraints, creativity entailed, and was manifested, in complex and dynamic processes of ‘creatively’ subverting constraints and creating ‘spaces’, where inputs relevant for building new products could be accessed, as well as engaging in co-creation activities in order to build their own competencies (Hjorth, 2005). I could achieve this understanding because I problematised taken-for-granted views projected in prevailing literature and introduced a new methodological approach, storytelling and insights from entrepreneurship research into my learning. These helped describe creative actions that characterise creative processes, and how such processes unfold over time, shaped by complex dynamic factors within and external to the small business (Dawson & Hjorth, 2012; Chilcott & Barry, 2016).

Based on the first claim, I have made a more general theoretical claim. In affirmation of the ideas of few researchers, I argue that what is currently presented as a universal approach to studying, and hence managing organisational creativity, needs to be treated with caution (Drazin et al., 1999; Martin, 2009; Blomberg, 2016). It would appear that Banks et al.'s (2002: 256) findings that 'the ways in which creativity is defined and managed are both varied and context specific' need to be taken more seriously than they currently are. By embracing the contested meanings, dimensions and perspectives underlying organisational creativity, research efforts are more likely to reveal relevant issues that have been overlooked by mainstream approaches.

My hope is that, as my concluding discussions proceed, I will be able to tactically create a fertile 'space' for readers to engage with my argument that for alternative ways of learning about organisational creativity are possible, and to consider the relevance of my thesis to existing knowledge of organisational creativity and how it is practised.

In the next section, I discuss the contributions of my research to organisational creativity literature and to practice. I then outline the limitations of my work and consequent directions for future research. I end the chapter with a brief but relevant section on how my research and I have become two actors engaged in a social construction of creativity.

## 7.2 Research Contributions

While my research has offered new insights to the current study and understanding of organisational creativity, my discussion here focuses on two theoretical contributions to the organisational creativity literature and my methodological contribution to empirical study of organisational creativity.

Based on findings from my research, I articulate an understanding of small businesses' creativity as novel and appropriate ways of operating that are used to negotiate ill-defined problems. In the case of GoTravel, this process took the form of (i) acknowledging the limitations within their own environment, and allowing this to guide subsequent decisions on creative ways to improve opportunities for developing new products, (ii) re-appropriating managerial orders that seemed to limit possibilities for accessing inputs required for such products from their product users, and (iii), creating 'spaces' within the managerial order where they could engage in 'play' activities in the form of co-creation to tap these inputs from product users.

While the creativity literature willingly accepts that creativity is a process of developing something new out of limited resources (Chilcott & Barry, 2016), it does not provide ways to conceptualise the actual processes organisations use when faced with such limitations (Zhou & Hoever, 2014). Thus, to further theorise and deepen current knowledge of small businesses' creative processes, I introduced interpretive lenses from entrepreneurship studies. Entrepreneurship studies in general prioritise creative ways individuals and/or organisations pursue and create opportunities for new ventures 'regardless of resources under their control' (Mainela

& Puhakka, 2011, Stevenson & Jarillo, 2007: 23). This perspective was thus useful in re-defining GoTravel, an organisation, which faced severe limitations in its journey towards developing opportunities for new creations and improvements (Gilson and Shalley, 2004), as one with potential to create new and useful products. Furthermore, using insights from the entrepreneurship literature has offered ways to illuminate the creative actions that underlie processes small businesses use to create opportunities for novelty. To illustrate, concepts, such as creating 'spaces' for 'play' under imposed orders (Hjorth, 2005), have made it possible to articulate the opportunity creation element of creative processes beyond what social psychology researchers have established straightforwardly as a cognitive ability that individuals engage in to develop new and useful ideas.

To shed light on the ways the small business leveraged the interactive spaces it shared with product users, in order to access inputs it had a relative paucity of, and to temporarily shift from its position of the 'weak' to one of power in the imposed 'place' (de Certeau, 1984), I use insights from studies in co-creation. Specifically, by studying the activities of the small business in their interactive spaces through the lenses of researchers who have focused on how organisations may engage in co-creation with stakeholders to build their own competencies at the expense of those stakeholders (e.g. Bonsu & Darmody, 2008), I was able to articulate the nature of some of the games the small business played in with its product users to its advantage (Hjorth, 2005).

Thus, another theoretical contribution to the organisational creativity literature relates to the attention I draw to the multiple places that creativity may reside. Till

date, research on organisational creativity views the organisation as the main or sometimes only 'site of action' in studying organisations development of novel solutions (Illustrated in Table 2.2, Chapter 2). Meanwhile researchers have suggested the need to treat this view with caution based on empirical findings that factors in the work environment may not necessarily encourage employee creativity in the ways suggested (Choi, 2004, Bowen, 2004). In addition, there is burgeoning literature, led to a large extent by open innovation scholars that the boundaries of this traditional site are gradually becoming porous (Chesbrough et al., 2014). One implication of this is that the nature of creative work is being restructured towards more cluster and network based approaches (Bilton, 2010). This may be especially so for industries categorised as hi-tech where it is becoming increasingly important to tap the latent knowledge of their networks.

My emphasis on GoTravel's relationship their product users illustrates the relevance of co-creating with customers to organisational creativity (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). This is not to argue that the 'traditional place' has lost its importance as a site of creative activities. Everyday examples such as Ideo and Google suggest that the development of imaginative ideas can still be nurtured by providing a work environment that encourages employees to experiment with ideas. However, shifts in how work is organised in some industries makes it important to shift our gaze to other less likely places for developing creative ideas.

One caveat of putting forward the argument that development of new and impactful ideas may occur outside firm boundaries (and thus with little influence by so-called creative employees regarded as heroes), in everyday interactions between the firm and its networks (product users in my case), is that it seems to dilute the

whole idea of 'creativity'. This is because, the shift in focus seems to attenuate the perceived 'magic' or 'sacred' moment usually associated with crafting new ideas by 'heroes' within organisations (Bilton, 2010). While this is understandable, an undue emphasis on them seems to have suppressed a systematic understanding of the processes and reasoning behind why and how businesses engage in creative processes. Moreover, the small business' approach to tactically negotiating their own internal constraints to facilitate the development of ideas, is by far one of the insightful creative processes I have encountered. While it was difficult to identify specific points in time when 'aha' or insightful moments occurred, I contend that GoTravel's re-appropriation of their 'shared place' or site of collaborations with product users embodies an ongoing creative process on its own merits. The third contribution of my research is an empirical one. As I have suggested in my literature review, only one out of five studies on creativity among small businesses has engaged a qualitative approach in the form of semi-structured interviews. This reflects general methodological approaches in the wider literature of organisational creativity (Chilcott & Barry, 2016). Such quantitative approaches, while contributing to knowledge of generalised patterns of creative behaviour, do not pay sufficient attention to deep reflective details within their contexts of study (Bailey et al., 2009). For this reason, I have contributed to empirical research on organisational creativity by using a qualitative case study approach to account for complexities and pluralities that shape and influence organisational creativity (Yin, 2014). Within this case, I drew on a mix of qualitative research methods (interviews, observations, email conversations, press information and confidential documents)

to make a valuable contribution in developing empirically grounded insights into small businesses' creativity.

Given that that organisational creativity literature is dominated by functionalist methods (Blomberg, 2016), my use of storytelling is one of a few attempts to articulate alternative discourses. This has been motivated by an aim to uncover aspects of creative processes currently hidden by managerial reductionist narratives and to enrich the study and presentation of findings from research (Blomberg, 2014). Storytelling, by accounting for the relational and social aspects, has offered ways to shift focus from individuals and outcomes to the processes of creativity currently lacking in literature (Dawson & Hjorth, 2012, Caniëls et al., 2014). In addition, 'storying' my findings using literary tools such as scenes, conflicts and resolutions offered tools to place emphasis on usually silenced and marginalised aspects of creative processes, such as the tensions and paradoxes small businesses face as they attempt to develop new and useful ideas while working under restricted resources (Greenhalgh et al., 2005). Finally, the insightful findings of how GoTravel's creative processes unfolded over time using the literary tools helped to provide a counter perspective of the static conclusions that usually emerge from common approaches. I turn now to the implications of the contributions I have brought to creativity research.



### 7.3 Implications for Practice

‘Jack is like the Kofi of my company’ (Architect working in a small architecture firm, Ghana)

‘Wow! I feel like this sometimes, sometimes I need room to breathe, to think (Architect working in a small architecture firm, Ghana)

‘Hmm... same story recurs everywhere!’ (Dance Lecturer, India)

These were some comments two friends (an Architect and a Dancer) made on my story in Chapter 5, when I asked them for their feedback. While small software development businesses comprise just one of the businesses routinely categorised under hi-technology firms, it has high convergence with other sectors. My friends’ comments, similar to those made by others I have discussed my findings with, suggest that my story of GoTravel’s creative processes is hardly an isolated instance, and that the insights I have developed may hold relevance to other companies. Based on my research findings, I humbly make a few recommendations to practice.

Firstly, while my research focused on small businesses, other organisations of different sizes may face similar difficulties while attempting to develop creative solutions within their internal boundaries. This may be due to a number of reasons such as, competing priorities that demand similar resources needed for engaging in creativity-relevant activities. For such businesses, a reasonable approach to developing new and useful ideas could be to approach creative processes as a deliberate and ‘tactical’ act of creating ‘spaces’ or opportunities where they can bring together resources relevant for building creative outcomes.

Next, new forms of organising work (as for instance the introduction of agile methods of software development as opposed to waterfall methodologies) appear increasingly committed to expanding the contexts we usually associate with creativity. Indeed, actors relevant to creative processes of organisations are beginning to span organisational boundaries to include external relationships and interactions with networks, such as product users that have previously only been considered marginally important to creative activities of organisations (Bilton, 2010). Without overstating the role of these new 'places' in processes organisations use to develop new and useful outcomes, I suggest that there is merit in business owners becoming more open to change and embracing new locations and actors for their role in building original products.

Third, while I have suggested that GoTravel's creative processes were profoundly influenced by product users' ideas, these may not always be a beneficial means for small businesses who seek to develop radical creative outcomes. This is because, although product users, and generally customers may have domain knowledge and thus be able to suggest ways of developing existing products, they are limited in forecasting future possibilities and often only conceptualise incremental changes. In other words, their ideas are more likely to revolve around their immediate needs as they may not envisage ideas that can become future breakthroughs (Zortea-Johnson et al., 2012). Thus, while the domain knowledge of product users can be useful for organisations, there is the need for businesses to seek for more 'creative' opportunities for radical products to be developed. The challenge here for most small businesses is the resources to fund and sponsor such

foresight activities and experimentations, since they are less likely to be supported by product users who often seek immediate results.

Although I have been confident in making some few recommendations to practice, my final suggestion is that there is strong merit for managers to pay close attention to the specific context creativity is organised and managed in order to provide relevant support for the processes essential to the development of creativity in organisations. Most of the insights on creative processes by the small business I studied may have been specific and emerged from a combination of factors in the time period in which I collected my data, when for instance company growth made it difficult for the small business to put in place organisational structures to support employee creativity. As some researchers have noted (Chilcott & Barry, 2016, Banks et al., 2003), recognising the embeddedness of creativity and its processes, within specific contexts is indispensable to current research on organisational creativity as it brings into the centre of discussions relevant elements of creative processes that are marginalised by hegemonic approaches that search for generic best practices.

#### 7.4 Limitations, Directions and Questions for Future Research

My in-depth study of creative processes of GoTravel, a small UK software business, has offered a strong foundation to confidently contribute to the organisational creativity literature, as well as to practice. Yet, the stories and interpretations I have presented, remain provocative insights rather than objective claims, in part, due to some limitations of my study. In this section, I set out those limitations and resulting directions for future research.

First, my focus on one small business may bring into question the generalisability of my findings to other organisational contexts (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). I admit that no matter the extent of detail, the findings from my study are mostly applicable to GoTravel, the business I studied.

While this may seem a disadvantage, my findings have provided compelling evidence to support the relevance of a situated and context-specific approach to studying organisational creativity (Banks et al., 2003). In other words, my findings offer good reasons for understanding creativity as a phenomenon, which is distinctively enacted through a combination of complex, related factors tied to specific contexts. As demonstrated in my empirical chapters (Chapters 5 and 6), GoTravel's creative processes at the time of my study were essentially shaped by the growth and expansion they experienced as well as changes in industry requirements on how software should be developed. In this sense, generic advice on how the development of new and useful ideas should be managed may not necessarily apply to this business with time. Thus, although my findings are contingent to this small business, they have an 'analytical generalisability' (Yin, 2003: 10). By this, I mean that my findings' 'generalisability' lie in drawing attention to the need for researchers to embrace how unique elements of the contexts they study (such as time period), shape creative processes.

A closely related limitation comes from the unique nature of small software businesses. Because small software businesses are 'usually' delineated by their need to constantly engage in acts aimed at potential generation of imaginative solutions (Carlo et al., 2012), deliberate engagement in processes in the way

GoTravel did to possibly facilitate creative outcomes is likely to be unique to such businesses. By contrast, deliberate processes aimed at developing original ideas may be minimally present among other companies who find alternative ways to thrive in markets outside of creative processes (such as through cost differentiation). While perceptions of the value of creativity even among small software businesses remain contested, it will be interesting in future work to more explicitly compare creative processes among businesses delineated as creative and others that do not explicitly seem to compete based on original ideas.

Another limitation of this research may be associated with my reliance on real 'stories' to articulate my findings and subsequent discussions. By real stories, I mean using a storytelling genre and fiction styles to report my findings. All research accounts are told as stories, or more generally narratives, even though conventions within particular research traditions restrict the extent of making explicit references to storytelling or literary features (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2004). In adopting explicit storytelling techniques such as fiction styles in my research, however, some may question the relevance of my research to actual organisational contexts. This is because the use of 'fiction' is usually construed as being removed from the realities of the 'real' world. However, as a social constructionist, I relied on stories, crafted and presented using elements of fiction, not to claim an objective representation of creativity in small businesses, but to provide a useful means to construct one of the many and contested realities of creative processes in organisations (Hosking & Hjorth, 2004, Greenhalgh et al., 2005).

In the final section, I make a few comments on how my understanding of creativity has evolved over the past four years and how these changes may have influenced me as a person first, and then as a researcher of creativity among small businesses.

## 7.5 Final Thoughts – ‘Creativity as Making Do’

Perhaps over the past four years, one of the most common comment people have made, when I have shared my research interest on organisational creativity is something along the lines of ‘you must be a very creative person’. With these words, they have often conveyed an impression that my own creative abilities may have shaped my research interest. And until recently, I have been quick to respond that this was not the case. I would usually explain that I was hardly the one among my peers to come up with the best new idea in the way creative people do. I had only set out to research creativity because I felt it was something useful that people engaged in. I considered it to be an indispensable resource for negotiating constraints and restrictions in varying forms and extents.

At the start of my internship with GoTravel, the small business at the centre of my research, I became aware of the severe resource and behavioural limitations the small business confronted internally and the vulnerable position it had in its market. My decision at this point was to develop a thesis that highlighted paradoxes and constraints that characterised the small business and the dilemmas these posed to management as they sought to support employees’ engagement in creative acts. By this, I would contribute to existing knowledge by challenging generally held

assumptions that such businesses (small-sized businesses) were naturally 'organised' to build creative responses.

However, as my data collection progressed, my knowledge of the small business' creative activities deepened, in a way that suggested the need to look beyond the appearances of the company to learn about its potential for generating original and useful solutions. The unsettling desire to explore creativity of this small business further, coupled with valuable discussions with my supervisors and other colleagues, as well as my reading of relevant literature stimulated the discussions I have raised in this thesis. Specifically, I realised that internal and external factors that at first glance appeared constraining to attempts at building new and useful ideas formed the basis of opportunities the small business created to engage in creativity-relevant processes.

Importantly, I found that rather than try to avoid their limitations, the business used those same limitations for ends that were beneficial to building and generating original solutions for product users. For instance, while close collaborations between GoTravel and product users allowed product users to directly impose restrictions on the ways GoTravel developed software, the small business capitalised on the increased interactions to elicit for more ideas, knowledge and funding from them to support building new and improved software solutions. Thus, for GoTravel, creativity was not merely a matter of producing new and useful outcomes as a result of resources they had per se. Instead, their creativity appeared to be in how they tactically created opportunities where creative outcomes could be realised by diverting their limitations to other uses.

In the course of my research, I have gradually come to re-define myself when it comes to creativity. Taking cues from GoTravel, I have reflected on a number of ways by which I have made other uses out of impositions to create opportunities that led to creative outcomes. I believe my thesis is one example of my efforts at re-appropriating limitations for new and useful outcomes my reader can readily grasp. Within hegemonic discourses of relevant literature on organisational creativity, I have created 'space' for new insights on creative processes to emerge. To do this, I have not discounted or rejected existing literature. Rather, assuming the position of the 'weak', I have acted in a similar way as GoTravel and the marginal groups of de Certeau's original context of study did. I have used the principles and assumptions of mainstream creativity research as a foundation to chart a new understanding for organisational creativity. For example, taking the organisational factors, which mainstream literature often treats as independent variables, I have argued that these factors may serve a more dynamic purpose of signalling the appropriate steps organisations must take towards developing new ideas. In the words of de Certeau (2005, xiii; my own words emphasised), I 'made of the rituals, representations and laws imposed by *mainstream approaches*, something quite different from what established researchers had in mind.

Revisiting my fascination with how those under constraints survive, my research suggests one plausible answer. They re-invent new uses out of their constraints, limitations or impositions. They 'make do' (de Certeau, 1984).



## APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE NOTES FROM OBSERVATIONS



Dim	Lun	Mar	Mer	Jeu	Ven	Sam
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Memo No. \_\_\_\_\_  
Date     /     /

28.10.14. → Development  
- Occasional chats and jokes thrown around. Very cordial/ environment friendly.

Everyone appears to be working hard, but there's an obvious feeling of enjoying what they do.

As soon as I get to the dept, one developer shouts 'hey glori, do you mind helping me with this code?' - everyone bursts out laughing and it makes me feel very much at home

The developer sat by me has a problem with what he's doing and walks to a fellow developer to ask for ideas. This appears to be the norm. Asking for help or clarification is not rare.

## APPENDIX 2: SAMPLE LINE BY LINE ANALYSIS OF DATA

The screenshot displays the Microsoft Word interface with a document titled "4 - Paint". The ribbon shows the "HOME" tab, with the "Font" group selected. The document text is as follows:

Creativity I suppose, when we started discussing this, I had interpreted the questions to be around more design, more aesthetics, visual creativity but now that you're asking the questions now, creativity obviously has different guises

We are constantly creating and constantly innovating in terms of, we continue to develop and enhance so from that perspective, I suppose that there is a lot of creativity that goes on and that's, um, is that vital to surviving in this industry? Mmm, I think it's vital to thriving. You can mimic and mirror what everyone else is doing and survive if you can keep costs down and you can play a different kind of game but the companies that lead, will be those who are looking for new ways to innovate, new ways of doing things, clever ways of doing things and GoTravel is no different. We're constantly bringing in new technology as well as using technology in an innovative way as well as customers come to us with requirements that need to be met, so we have to sit down and think about and dream up how we're gonna develop the system to meet those requirements. Is that creativity? That's not creativity in the artistic sense of the word, and I suppose that was how I was interpreting it initially, but creativity in the truest sense of the word, yes, it's about creating in terms of new ideas and new ways of thinking

How does the industry affect what you do? What are some of the factors in the industry that affect what you do?

The travel industry is subject to international and political landscape, so travel generally, people stop travelling when there are outbreaks of Ebola, people stop travelling when there's war in Afghanistan, they stop travelling when volcanoes erupt so there's a host of external factors that influence travellers' decisions to travel. Which in turn influences our customers' ability to sell travel and that in turn influences the willingness or need to buy technology so that definitely, our industry is significantly affected by large scale external, and economic and political and even geographic or weather based issues. Legislation plays a role as well. Travel

The sidebar on the right lists definitions of creativity by Gloria Appiah (Research Student):

- Gloria Appiah (Research Student) June 05, 2015  
Definition= what we think of creativity influences our attitude to it
- Gloria Appiah (Research Student)  
the practice of creativity is ongoing, constantly happening.
- Gloria Appiah (Research Student)  
How essential is creativity to software development?
- Gloria Appiah (Research Student)  
Constantly creating, ongoing
- Gloria Appiah (Research Student)  
creating the space
- Gloria Appiah (Research Student)  
Definitions of creativity

## **APPENDIX 3: CONSENT FORMS**

### **PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

(PRODUCT USER)

**Title of Research Project: The Nature and Processes of Creativity in Small Businesses: What May We Learn from A Small Software Firm?**

#### **Brief Description of Research Project, and What Participation Involves:**

This research is an attempt to understand better the nature of creativity in small software businesses. Though a lot of research has been done on workplace creativity, much of the attention has been paid to large firms. As a result, very little is known of what constitutes creativity by small businesses. I hope that the knowledge and insights you share as part of the overall findings of this study will deepen the current understanding of creativity as it pertains to small firms particularly within the software industry given the resourcefulness of this industry in sustaining the global knowledge economy.

I anticipate that the interview will last about forty-five minutes. To allow the insights you share to be accurately recorded and transcribed, I will also seek your permission to audio record the interview. Otherwise, I will take notes manually. If at any time during the interview you feel uncomfortable with the information being shared, I shall stop recording or taking notes or both depending on your preference.

Please, I expect to conduct only one interview with you. However, I would like to seek your permission to contact you again to follow up and/ clarify any ideas that might arise from this interview.

#### **Investigator Contact Details:**

Name: Gloria Appiah

Department: Roehampton Business School

University Address: University of Roehampton.

Postcode: SW15 4PA

Email: APPIAHG@ROEHAMPTON.AC.UK

Telephone: + 44 07576858505

**Consent Statement:**

I agree to take part in this research, and I am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point without giving a reason, although if I do so I understand that my data might still be used in a collated form. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings, and that data will be collected and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and with the University's Data Protection Policy.

Name .....

Signature .....

Date .....

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator (or if the researcher is a student you can also contact the Director of Studies.) However, if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Director of Studies.

**Director of Studies Contact Details**

Name: Professor Wilson Ng

Address: University of Roehampton

Email: [ng.wilson@roehampton.ac.uk](mailto:ng.wilson@roehampton.ac.uk)

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## **PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

(EMPLOYEE)

### **Title of Research Project: The Nature and Processes of Creativity in Small Businesses: What May We Learn from A Small Software Firm?**

#### **Brief Description of Research Project, and What Participation Involves:**

This research is an attempt to understand better the nature of creativity in small software firms. Though a lot of research has been done on workplace creativity, much of the attention in this regard has been paid to large firms. As a result, very little is known of what constitutes creativity within small firms. I hope that the knowledge and insights you share as part of the overall findings of this study will deepen the current understanding of creativity as it pertains to small firms particularly within the software industry given the resourcefulness of this industry in sustaining the global knowledge economy.

I anticipate that the interview will last about an hour with you at time and location convenient to you. The interview will involve questions about how you usually organise your creative activities. To allow the insights you share to be accurately recorded and transcribed, I will also seek your permission to audio record the interview. Otherwise, I will take notes manually. If at any time during the interview you feel uncomfortable with the information being shared, I shall stop recording or taking notes or both depending on your preference.

Please, I expect to conduct only one interview with you. However, I would like to seek your permission to contact you again to follow up and/ clarify any ideas that might arise from this interview.

#### **Investigator Contact Details:**

Name: Gloria Appiah

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Postcode: SW15 4PA

Email: APPIAHG@ROEHAMPTON.AC.UK

**Consent Statement:**

2 I agree to take part in this research, and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point without giving a reason, although if I do so I understand that my data might still be used in a collated form. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings, and that data will be collected and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and with the University's Data Protection Policy.

Name .....

Signature .....

Date .....

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator (or if the researcher is a student you can also contact the Director of Studies.) However, if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Head of Department.

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## **PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

### **(MANAGER-PERMISSION)**

**Title of Research Project: The Nature and Processes of Creativity in Small**

**Businesses: What May We Learn from A Small Software Firm?**

#### **Brief Description of Research Project, and What Participation Involves:**

This research is an attempt to understand better the nature of creativity in small software firms. Though a lot of research has been done on work place creativity, much of the attention in this regard has been paid to large firms. As a result, very little is known of what constitutes creativity within small firms. I hope that the knowledge and insights you share as part of the overall findings of this study will deepen the current understanding of creativity as it pertains to small firms particularly within the software industry given the resourcefulness of this industry in sustaining the global knowledge economy.

This form is to seek permission to have interviews with employees in your firm. I anticipate the interviews to last about an hour with each employee at a time and location convenient to them and acceptable to you. The interview will involve questions about how your organisation usually carries out your creative activities. To allow the insights shared to be accurately recorded and transcribed, I will also seek your permission to audio record the interviews. Otherwise, I will take notes manually.

I expect to conduct only one interview with all participants. However, I would like to seek your permission to contact the employees again to follow up and/ clarify any ideas that might arise from this interview.

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#### **Consent Statement:**

3 I agree for my organisation to take part in this research, and am aware that I (my organisation) am free to withdraw at any point without giving a reason, although if I do so I understand that my data might still be used in a collated form. I understand that the information my organisation provides will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings, and that data will be collected and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and with the University's Data Protection Policy.

Name .....

Signature .....

Date .....

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator (or if the researcher is a student you can also contact the Director of Studies.) However, if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Head of Department.

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